A WIFE'S STORY,

AND

OTHER TALES.

VOL. II.

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BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

BY

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&c., &c.

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from her jaileress by requesting the honour of a few moments' conversation with the Fräulein on the subject of the private concert to be given shortly at her Institute—at the same time stating that, as his mother was somewhat indisposed, it would be well that the honoured lady should postpone the favour of her visit.

"Will she see *me?* may *I* go on?" asked Annie, timidly.

"Will my mother see you! Certainly, Das versteht sich:" (*ça va sans dire*). Herr von Heilmann's tone was rather reproachful, while there was a slight twinkle of amusement in the corner of his eye. Then, from courtesy to the Fräulein ogress (for a man must be courteous to an ogress who has more or less power to torment his heart), he added, still addressing Annie—"My mother stands on no ceremony with you, you know. The visit of the Fräulein Grüppe being a more unwonted honour——"

Annie sped on, and Fräulein Grüppe, well pleased, turned to accompany Herr von Heilmann some distance on his way. She knew now that there was little chance of Annie's seeing her master again that day, for she knew that Herr von Heilmann's engagements would detain him till long after Annie's leave of absence would have expired. Annie sped on, but when she reached the familiar door her heart failed her; she made no sudden ascent and rapid incursion, as had been her wont; her feet faltered; she approached her old friend with shy hesitation.

Frau von Heilmann sat in her cold-weather place near the stove to-day—knitting, of course. She greeted Annie with kindliness, but there was less motherliness and some restraint in her manner. She was under orders; the one subject on which she was not to speak was ever present to her, naturally.

"More crippled than ever, my dear," she said, in answer to Annie's questions. "I'm set fast till Spring now, and that seems a long time to look forward to, for at my age one cannot look for many more earthly Springs. Very pretty, my child, and very warm," she said, as she drew on a pair of mittens Annie had brought her. "So you have sometimes thought of the old woman all this time—eh? You made these for her!"

"Yes; you did not think I had forgotten—would not have come to you if I could? I have been hindered and tormented; the time has been very long." The tears were in Annie's eyes.

"Poor little one! It is as Gottfried says; you are thinner and paler."

"He said so—he notices, then?"

"Why should he not? You know how kind-hearted and compassionate he is; his eyes are keen too. Don't you remember, child, when that poor teacher at Fräulein

Grüppe's first fell ill, that it was my Gottfried who noticed how she drooped and withered—as it was my Gottfried who had her brought here, and nursed, and tended till she died—the poor old, worn-out, friendless thing!"

"I remember," sighed Annie.

"As I was saying," proceeded Frau von Heilmann, "I am set fast till Spring. I do not care much to go out; from that window, where Gottfried sets me whenever the sun shines, I see plenty of life and movement. A still, contained, inward-turned existence is the most fitting for an aged woman, some think, but I don't much believe it, Aennchen. While we are in this world, it seems to me more beautiful and right to live its joys and sorrows—through those of others, when our own are past. The thing that does sometimes fret me is, that I cannot hear my Gottfried play in public, and see how they court and praise him. Last night, in the concert-room of the Schauspeilhaus, he

played grandly, they tell me. Did you hear him, child?"

"No."

"He likes to play in that room; and then the concert was given for the benefit of the widows and orphans of actors and musicians. Yes, he played grandly; the Gräfinn Rosalie von Thauenwald has been here this morning, brimming over with enthusiasm. She has paid me a great deal of attention lately;—Aennchen mein, can she fancy that the simple old mother does not see through her?" Frau von Heilmann laughed merrily but not ill-naturedly. "Well, she is a pretty creature. I do not hold in great esteem the gay young widows of old husbands, nor, indeed, any widow whose life shows no effort to bring itself into accord with the apostle's description of that of 'eine rechte Wittwe,' 'die einsam ist, die ihre Hoffnung auf Gott stellet.' But she is a pretty creature; there are many excuses to be made for her, and she may say" (through the sober-minded and pious

demeanour of this German woman would sometimes flash a spark of French vivacity—'wicked-wise,' she called it) "that she has, at any rate, set her heart upon the peace of God (Gottfried). I do not see how I can think the worse of her for that, though in my young days it was not the fashion for women, whether maidens or widows, to do the courting. Yet, undeniably, she is a charming creature, and seems to me to have more heart than most of her kind. Do you know her, Aennchen?"

"By sight only, liebe Frau."

To-day it was not Mütterchen and Töchterchen. Formerly the old dear words had been innocently used; they could be so no longer; they must mean their meaning, or not be spoken. If to-day they were uttered by chance, Annie would blush and grow confused beneath Frau von Heilmann's shrewd, inquiring look. In one of the awkward pauses ensuing, when this had happened, Annie turned her eyes upon the

flowers filling a vase on the table which stood near, and commented on their beauty.

"Yes, they are lovely; but I do not much love to see such a forcing of the fair order of nature. May lilies in November must feel themselves so not-at-homeish. They came from the young Gräfinn; she sent them this morning, with the prettiest of notes, before she came herself. There lies the note, child; read it if you will—observe how neatly she compliments Gottfried in the postscript. He read it with the grimmest of faces, nevertheless. I have had many such pretty notes with neat postscripts. Ach, Aennchen, when the opera comes out, I expect I shall have a fine time of it, with bouquets and billets-doux, fruits, bonbons, and what not! Sometimes I feel quite grieved that the pretty creatures should waste so much time and trouble. If I say so to Gottfried, he answers, with one of his inwardly-amused looks—'You have the benefit, mother mine; they are not harmed, nor am I.'"

"But they must be harmed, and he too," cried Annie.

"Ech! you think so, child. *Place aux dames;* we will begin with the ladies. 'They must be harmed,' you say—and why? It is no question of the true feelings of true women; it is puppet-play. Take Gottfried from them, and they will set up some less worthy idol. Is it not something that it should be a true man and a true musician before whom they play out their little game?"

"Perhaps."

"Where, for them, do you find the harm, then, of their amusement?"

"I do not know; perhaps nowhere. Yet I feel as if it were somewhere."

"As you do not know, we will pass on. You say he, too, must be harmed. How? Do you think this sort of thing will make my Gottfried vain?"

"No, no, no, I was not thinking that Herr von Heilmann could be made vain;

but—but must it not be harmful to any man to have his notion of women brought so low?"

"It must be harmful to any man to have his notion of women brought low—yes, child, there you are right; but on my son these things do not work thus. Even if, every day of his life, he were pained, grieved, disgusted, by seeing women so far from what he would have them—seeing their actions characterised by a want of all true humility, as by a want of all modest dignity,—this would in no way affect his reverence for abstract womanhood, or lower his Ideal. I know this, not only because, when we have talked on the subject, he has said it, but also because his conduct in many instances has proved it to me. He is too through-and-through chivalrous—too wholly the soul of honour—for these things to work upon him harmfully. It seems to me that his eye pierces through the atmosphere of frivolous untruth and fashionable

ugliness with which we so often surround ourselves, and reaches to the central potential truth of our being. The spiritual insight of such a nature may, in the most seemingly frivolous of fashionable follies, detect the stirring and striving of a saving element—the blind beating of the bars, and the dazzled fluttering towards the truth—may therefore detect something not unworthy of reverence. Reverence is the inmost principle of my Gottfried's nature. I have never seen the thing bearing the shape of woman that he seemed able to scorn. With such a man a woman is safe, let her—— But I am prosing. When I talk of Gottfried, the subject sometimes runs away with me, Aennchen." As she spoke, she suddenly looked from her knitting full into the girl's face. "Prosing and philosophising—I have just been reading the Herr Professor Dichmann's work."

Then, while Annie's heart was throbbing and burning to say some little word that

should prove her recognition of the nobleness of such high faith and chivalry, the clever old woman began to talk with lucidity and power of the book she had just named—talk which ended in being in itself a little philosophical essay—a mental exercise for self-improvement—for she knew right well that Annie heard little, and understood less, of what she was saying.

After Annie had risen to go, Frau von Heilmann said,

"The Christmas holidays cannot be very far now; you must spend them with me, as you did the Midsummer. I will arrange that with the Fräulein Grüppe. You are not sold to her, body and soul, Aennchen, so pluck up courage, and don't be so much afraid of her as Gottfried thinks you are, poor child! Should she send you away, I could no doubt find you a place would suit you as well—perchance better." Here she restrained a mischievous smile, which, spite of her efforts, indicated itself. "Through

the Christmas weeks I shall be alone, as I was at Midsummer," she went on. "Gottfried goes to some of his grand friends—a round of visits in the neighbourhood, from one Schloss to another. I wish it; I send him. I did not desire that he should be a musician—I wished to see him a soldier, as his father was; but since he is a musician, I desire for him as great a name and as wide a fame, being a musician, as had his father, being a soldier. The more he is known, the more he is respected. The people he goes to, have influence—will be useful,—so I send him, my Gottfried, out into the world."

The old woman's dark eyes flashed under the bushy, snow-white brows—a flash that quickened the beating of Annie's heart.

In leave-taking to-day, Annie stooped to kiss the old brown hands. They drew her down. Frau von Heilmann kissed her solemnly on both cheeks, with the words—"God guide thee, child." Then, still holding the girl fast, she added:

"Gottfried gave me a message. He says, Aennchen, he begs of you to remember that, however your heart may decide in a certain matter, you must not flee from us and shun us—that we, he and his mother, will always be your friends. He earnestly begs of you to remember this. He says that, if you choose so, he can be to you only a friend, and yet with all his might your friend. This is true—I know it. There, I have given his message, and again I say God guide thee, my child."

Again, and more fervently, Annie kissed the old woman's hands; then she hurried away.

Outside, instead of turning towards her prison-house, though she had already over-stayed her time, Annie took her way through the sodden paths and the bare trees of the great garden, towards the dismal banks of the black canal. She wanted freedom—open air—space. She felt that, just then, she could not endure to

be shut in between walls, surrounded by eyes and tongues.

Having gained the canal-path, she hurried on and on, faster and faster, unconsciously driven by her driving thoughts, not heeding the increasing cold and darkness.

When at length she paused and turned, she was frightened to find herself alone so late in that dismal place. The lights of the town, the few she could see through the branches of the trees which intervened between her and it, looked far off; nothing seemed near but the clinging, clammy fog and the crawling water.

Presently it seemed to her that, walk swiftly as she would, a following footstep gained upon her. Between her and the town, after she should have crossed the bridge, lay the desolate gardens, as dreary and deserted at this hour as any savage wilderness or wood. There came into her mind, against her will, stories she had heard about things that had happened in this

neighbourhood, and the steady tramp, tramp, tramp, of the gaining footstep excited her wildest fears.

Reaching the bridge just as she knew, by the sound, that her pursuer, if such he were, was upon her, she paused there, breathless and exhausted, ready, in the desperation of her fear, to jump into the water—either that, or he should pass her before she entered the garden.

A figure, looking large through the fog, was at her side; it passed. She thought she had not been observed; her heart gave a great bound; then the person, who was so much an object of her dread, paused and turned. Annie clutched the low parapet of the bridge, and held herself ready for a spring.

"Is it possible!—here alone, at this hour?" questioned the voice, which she had no doubt now, was the dearest to her in all the world.

Poor Annie! she sprang to Herr von

Heilmann, and clasped both little hands round his arm, beside herself with relief and gratitude for the first moment.

"You knew me, then?" was her senseless question.

"Not at first, Fräulein; and now it seems too incredible. I paused and turned because I could not let myself pass by any woman in such a place, at such an hour, without making her the offer of my protection."

Annie's hands loosed themselves and fell from off his arm. What could he think of her? She felt her soul shrink from the severe pain expressed by his voice. Would he not have cause now to believe the worst Fräulein Grüppe might choose to tell him of her insubordination and wild imprudence?

Poor Annie! It was a pity the darkness had made it impossible for her to detect the light, sudden and sweet, that had come into his face, the twinkle of the eye and twitch of the mouth, when he felt the confiding

clasp of those little hands. She had once seen something like it, in the very early days of their acquaintance, when she talked his tongue with blundering difficulty. She had let a "du" slip out instead of the fit and formal "sie," and had for a moment wondered what error of hers had caused the look of repressed but pleased amusement, the transient sparkle, which she saw cross her master's grave face.

As well as she could, the poor child excused herself as they walked towards the town side by side. Her longing for air and and liberty had been irresistible, she told him; it was, sometimes: till the last few years, she had led such a free life. She had been thinking, and had not noticed how far she went or how dark it grew. She had paused on the bridge because the following footstep frightened her, and she felt safer there than in the garden.

"How could the bridge save you, my Fräulein?"

"The water might have saved me," she answered.

"Ach Himmel!" She did not catch his exclamation, or know the inward shudder—the inward grasping clasp of her—with which it was breathed. He said a few strong words of the danger she had incurred, but he did not speak any personal reproof—from him to her; that he assumed no right to do.

"I will not do so any more; I will not do anything so imprudent again; I am very sorry," Annie said, with childlike simplicity and fervour of penitence. "Now, think of it no more, pray!" she added, with some dignity.

"It is not a thing to be lightly dismissed from the mind, Fräulein; but I thank you earnestly for the goodness of your promise, and we will speak of the painful subject no more."

What did they then speak of? Nothing.

Herr von Heilmann was silent—from

pain and displeasure, Annie thought. In truth, he was both pained and displeased, but infinitely pitiful too; and the subject of his thoughts was how best to extricate the heedless girl from the unpleasant consequences of her imprudence. They were in the Garten Strasse by the time he had settled that matter with himself.

"It will be best that you come to my mother," he said to Annie. "She will scold you sharply, but you know how good her heart is towards you. You must sup with us, and afterwards our old Hans shall conduct you to Fräulein Grüppe's, and my mother will send you with a note, in which she will apologise for having detained you."

"You are very kind. I am much ashamed to give so much trouble. Would it not, perhaps, be better that I should return at once?"

They stood under the entrance-lamp now, and she was reassured by the kindliness of his face, as he answered, half jestingly—

"To be sent, like a naughty child, supperless to bed. The frugal evening meal is long over at the Fräulein Grüppe's. No; enter with me; you are half-starved and very tired; let my mother see you rested and refreshed before you return."

So they mounted the stairs, and together entered the well-warmed and lighted room, where the table was already spread for the friendly evening meal.

Herr von Heilmann hastened to offer to his mother a few words of explanation, adding, in a lighter and more familiar tone than he had used while they were alone, and gently laying his hand on Annie's shoulder as he spoke—

"Do not scold our poor little friend much, mother. She is tired and starved and cold, and she has promised, the good child, to be no more so imprudent."

With those words he passed through the room to his own apartments; and poor Annie, overcome by his kindness and the

weakness of her own exhaustion, knelt down before his mother, rested her head on her lap, and burst into tears.

But neither those tears nor Herr von Heilmann's intercession saved Annie from a sharp scolding—a stinging reproof: after which the truest motherly kindness was lavished upon her.

Annie spent two very happy hours. It was so warm, so bright, so home-like, so every way pleasant, in Frau von Heilmann's living-room at the restful, comfortful, friendly hour when the Abend-brod was eaten—the time when, the day's labour done, the mother and son drew nearest to each other. Annie—little, strange, and friendless Annie—was made to feel neither strange nor friendless, but one of the home inmates.

As by-and-by she stepped out into the bitter night, followed by the old house-servant, Hans, she drew close round her the soft warm shawl of Frau von Heilmann's, which her master had himself hung

upon her shoulders, and said to herself—

"What do I care for the night or the cold—or her cruelty? Let the night be black and the wind biting. Let the Fräulein speak swords and look poison and daggers. It is well with me—all is warm to me—all is well with me."

This evening Annie's confidences to herself were made, not in the old home-tongue, but in the tongue of the home she had just left, the home which she had been made to feel, if even she had not been told, stood ready for her, waiting to be, when she willed it, her home. Lovingly she dwelt upon some of the homely home-suggested phrases of the friendly tongue, and she was happy, so happy, till the old doubt returned. How could he love her? How *should* he love her? How otherwise than with "pity and grave kindness" should such a man love a girl like her?

If so—if he loved her so, and only so, well? was not this, from him, enough for

her ?—for her happiness? For her—for her happiness? Yes. But for him—for his happiness? Annie believed that, through his music, she knew something of her master that obliged her to answer the question with a fatal "no."

She was at her prison-house.

"Leben sie wohl, my most highly-honoured Fräulein," old Hans was saying.

If she were sharply rated or escaped lightly, she did not know.

CHAPTER IV.

ON the following Friday, Herr von Heilmann and the Fräulein Grüppe had a slight altercation, if such it could be called. The lady was angry and excited (perhaps, beginning to despair of her game, she sometimes let her mask slip on one side); the gentleman was courteous, severe, and resolute.

"You desire that Fräulein Gresham should play at your concert, madame. Well, I think it a pity; she is too nervous for it not to be painful to her to do so—too nervous to do herself or me justice; but if I bow to your desire in this matter, I cannot be dictated to as regards the composition she should render."

"As to her nervousness, mein Herr, she must conquer that. In her position she has no business to indulge in any such nonsense. Upon her playing I shall insist; and I much desire that she should play the Prelude and Fugue in C minor, composed by my late lamented father on the occasion of the death of the most worthy Princess Wilhelmina."

"Impossible, madame. The merit of the composition is a question upon which I will not presume to enter; but that it should be played by such hands as these" (here, with the most entirely business-like gravity, a complete absorption in the matter under discussion, he took up one of Annie's hands —she was sitting at the piano beside him— and laid it upon his own) "is a physical impossibility. These fingers are lithe, and the wrist" (raising it, and giving it a little shake) "is finely flexible; still, the composition of which you speak is not for such hands as these."

So saying, he seemed suddenly to awake to the consciousness that the hand he had again placed on his—the more strongly, by force of contrast, to mark its minuteness—was something more than a piece of dainty mechanism. He gently replaced it on the keys of the piano, with a look, as he said, "Verzeihen sie, gnädigste Fräulein," that was from him a caress. But Annie, sitting passive while her fate was discussed, did not raise her eyes.

He turned again to the watchful Fräulein Grüppe, and continued, severely,

"As to this concert, the credit or discredit of it will be mine; the arrangement of the programme, and allotment of the music, is therefore wholly my affair, and I cannot submit, madame, to even such judicious and wise co-operation as yours would doubtless be. With my other pupils the playing or not playing on this occasion has been a matter of choice. I do not see why it should be compulsory on the part of the Fräulein

Gresham. I therefore ask her—Miss Gresham, is it agreeable to you that your name should be placed upon the programme?"

The question was put in the severe tone which he had used to Fräulein Grüppe, but the thoughtful eyes were full of kindness when they met Annie's. Annie cared for nothing in the matter but to please her master. It was impossible to her, after meeting that look, to answer his question otherwise than with another.

"Do you wish it?"

This time she detected a certain pleasant change in his face—enough to assure her that she had pleased him. Before he answered he appeared to reflect for a moment, then said,

"On the whole, I think—yes."

"I must stipulate," he continued, turning upon Fräulein Grüppe, "that Miss Gresham shall have the use of a piano for at least three hours daily." As he rose to go, he added—

"I have always had pride and pleasure in my English pupils, finding among them some of the most intelligent and industrious of my scholars. I assure myself that it is not Fräulein Gresham who will prove the exception."

He did not allow himself to seek an answer in Annie's face, or he would have met a very bright one.

"I cannot make them out!" Fräulein Grüppe remarked to her confidential friend. "If there is anything between them, she is the slyest little thing. I have watched and watched, and I cannot detect a spark of coquetry or consciousness in her conduct. She is altogether the good pupil; sits and looks like a demure baby: 'Mais il n'est, comme on dit, pire eau que l'eau qui dort."

"The English women are so controlled, so quiet and so deep, you see, dear Angel," answered the friend addressed. "This girl is no doubt cunning enough to know the kind of manner-of-being (Art zu seyn) likely

to catch a grave man of middle age like Herr von Heilmann, who in a wife would probably like to find the docility that other men, who marry earlier, look for in their children."

"'Catch!' 'wife!' You don't mean to tell me, my dearest"—the voice was sharp and angry—"that you think there is any danger—that you fancy he means to marry her?"

"No, no, no—a thousand times no!" cried the alarmed confidant. "Last time I had the happiness of seeing him with you, I thought there was a decided, a pronounced—in short, a something difficult to describe, but certainly a something in his manner towards you, dearest Angel, very different from his manner towards other women."

After that Friday, Annie set her heart to her music more than she had ever done before, though she had always loved it, and often found in it the one delight of dreary days. She no longer meekly relinquished

to the first claimant the hours of study to which she had a right, and by rising very early she secured others which no one contested with her. She had set her heart towards her music, and yet, though she loved it, not for its own sake; the heart set towards the art was set upon pleasing the master. With the singular simplicity and singleness of purpose of which she was capable, she kept this aim in sight. She was conscious that he especially desired her success; she did not question "why." Also she was conscious that she especially desired to please him; she did not question "why" or "what more." To the publicity of the concert she looked forward with no dread and no pleasure, but with intense anxiety. She would be no more nervous in playing before fifty people than in playing before her master only; their presence would merely affect her in as far as it affected him, making her more desirous to do well because she believed that it made him more desirous

that she should do so. The one thing cared about was, that she should not shame or disappoint him.

But before that day came, other things happened to Annie.

CHAPTER V.

"A VISIT" and "Fräulein Gresham" were words that fell on Annie's ears as she sat in class one morning—unwonted words, falling there so strangely that she paid them no heed, did not believe that she had heard rightly. But when the class was over, Fräulein Grüppe sent her down to the refectory to receive a visitor. The refectory was a long bare room; long tables and long forms, and the inevitable piano, were its only furniture. Visitors were ordinarily received in the salon, but Annie was so greatly out of favour that any place was good enough for a friend of hers.

"What dungeon do I find you in!" exclaimed a clear ringing English voice, as

Annie entered the room. Her hands were taken, and her cheeks were kissed by a moustached mouth, before she had time to recognise her visitor.

"Cousin Basil!" her tone was half joyful, half doubtful.

"Do you doubt it? Will you have me turned away as an impostor? Have you quite forgotten me?"

"You are grown from a boy into a man, remember, and I had no reason to expect to see you. Where have you dropped from? Oh, it is pleasant to hear a home voice and see a home face!"

"I'm glad you think so. I have had a world of difficulty in finding you out. I am here for a few days *en route* for home. This place is not really *en route*, but I made it so to see you. And now how can I see you in any satisfactory way? Do you ever get out? I am staying in a very pleasant family—the family of a friend of mine out there. They are really hospitable people—

will be delighted to see you. Can I speak to the principal here and get you leave of absence? You could tell her I'm your brother, if you think she would not trust you with a cousin."

"She knows I have no brother—no near relations," Annie answered, smiling.

"No near relations! What do you call me, then, eh?"

"A second cousin is hardly a near though he may be a dear relation, Basil. Though you used to be like a brother to me, I cannot pass you off as one. Oh, how long do you stay? Of course, I *must* see something of you. I will manage it somehow."

"I only meant to stay a couple of days, but I fancy it may be a couple of weeks. To tell the truth, one of my friend's sisters is an uncommonly nice girl, and she can speak English, and it's uncommonly jolly to hear her do it. I must get home before Christmas, however. Annie, what

becomes of you in the holidays? Why not come over with me?"

"That is perfectly impossible, Basil."

"I know of old that 'perfectly impossible' of yours; it was always a settler. But how about getting out? Can't you come at once? The day is glorious; it is a shame to lose it in this den. Couldn't you take a good walk with me in those gardens? I have a world of things to tell you about."

While Annie was hesitating, Fräulein Grüppe came into the room, curious as to her teacher's visitor. For some reason of her own she proved wonderfully gracious, accepted the guarantee of cousinship as all-sufficient, was charmed that her young friend should have the pleasure of seeing a countryman, granted immunity from all the duties of the day, and urged that they should enjoy the beautiful weather by going out-doors at once.

"At what hour is it likely to be most

convenient for me to take my music-lesson, madame?" Annie asked; "this is Herr von Heilmann's afternoon, you remember, and I shall wish to return for my lesson."

"Excuse yourself that also for once, my too industrious Mees," was the answer in broken English. "I charge myself with your excuses."

"Yes, yes; a whole holiday. As madame is so good, I claim you for all the day!" cried Basil. "This evening we are going to the opera; you must join us, Annie. There are to be ladies of the party, madame."

"Exactly, sir; I can quite well confide my young friend to your care, I perceive. Go, dear Mees, and prepare yourself: the while I will entertain your cousin."

"An easy-going soul for a school-mistress," was Basil's comment as they left the house. "Young and handsome herself, she's fond of gaiety, no doubt, and so has more sympathy with the pleasures of other

people. Are you comfortable with her, Annie?"

"I might be worse off; on the whole, I am not unhappy," was Annie's evasive answer.

"And that is all you can say for yourself, poor little thing?" Basil drew his cousin's hand through his arm as he spoke. She did not like to withdraw it, though there were reasons why she would not have had it there.

The day was keen and bright. Annie enjoyed the brisk movement through the light clear air, the sense of freedom, her cousin's merry reminiscences of their early happy country life; above all she enjoyed the befriended feeling his presence gave her, the sense of kinship, of belonging to somebody. A second cousin was something to one so friendless, who so often felt herself so mere a "waif and stray." But in her enjoyment Annie did not forget her music or her master, or her determination,

unrevealed to the Fräulein Grüppe, to be at the school by the time Herr von Heilmann was due there. After her lesson she would go out again—go to the opera, if Fräulein Grüppe chose to permit her. Of this she was doubtful; but she would take her chance—any way, not sacrifice her lesson. The schoolhouse was not far from the gardens; the iron gate of its prison walls was visible through the vista of the grand avenue. As they turned towards it, laughing and talking gaily, eyes and cheeks bright with the keen yet sunny air, drawing many eyes (of which they were wholly unconscious) upon them, Annie saw Herr von Heilmann leave the gate and come towards them.

Annie hurried on her companion; she wished to see her master, to question, to explain. It still wanted half an hour of the time at which he usually began to give his lessons. Just as they were about to meet, Herr von Heilmann, lifting his hat

to Annie with very grave courtesy, turned into a narrower side-path.

"I say, Annie, who's your friend? That grand, soldierly-looking fellow?" asked Basil.

"That was Herr von Heilmann," Annie answered, in rather a choked voice.

"Who is Herr von Heilmann?"

"My music-master," spoken with still more difficulty. "I am too late! He has given his lessons earlier, and she did not tell me. I am too late." Annie pulled down her veil.

"So much the better—no need to go in, then. That man a music-master! I should not have dreamt it. What a pity; he ought to be colonel of a regiment; he might be a great General. He reminded me of some of the portraits of Garibaldi."

Poor Annie! she felt as if all her pleasure in her holiday was gone; she let her companion take her just where he would. But Annie's was a light, elastic temperament;

not fickle, but flexible; true as steel, and bending rather than breaking, as does highly-tempered steel.

The people to whose house Basil took her were friendly and kind. She so seldom had any change or gaiety, so seldom saw kind faces and heard kind words, that when she found herself one of a merry circle gathering round the table where the afternoon coffee was being poured out, and the object of universal kindness and interest, she could not help brightening again—feeling her own heart expand in that heart-full home-atmosphere. She would be happy, she resolved; yet Herr von Heilmann's grave face and stately bow frequently presented themselves to her; she feared that he was pained and displeased: for the displeasure she did not so much care, because she had not merited it, and could by a word of explanation remove it; but the pain—she took that to heart, as *her* pain.

The operetta given that night was a

light, sparkling piece—it suited Basil's taste well, and it amused Annie. Without stirring or delighting, it amused her, while the brilliant scene, the dazzle of light, and the mirth of her companions, excited her. Anne was very gay; her look of enjoyment and her sweet, yet piquant prettiness, drew many eyes upon her. She did not know this, for she was an unconscious little creature, who gave herself wholly, as far as the outer world was concerned, to the interest of the moment—to seeing what she had come to see, and hearing what she had come to hear. So she was unrestrainedly gay till, during the last act, she became aware that Herr von Heilmann was in the house—in the box of the beautiful young Gräfinn Rosalie von Thauenwald. The box commanded that part of the parquet in which Annie sat—he must surely have seen her; but after she became aware of his presence, he did not look towards her. He stood behind the Gräfinn's chair; leaning against

a pillar, he looked towards the stage. Again and again Annie felt her eyes irresistibly drawn towards him; his face expressed neither pleasure nor displeasure; he looked quiet, cold, critical,—a man of marble. Suddenly the wonderful thought came to Annie of how it was this man, who had once drawn her to his breast, held her against his heart!—Should she ever, ever be again so near him? Or would the lovely face of that young Gräfinn some day rest there? How strangely she felt, as this thought filled her with its marvellously-mingled sweet and bitter!

Annie had looked once too often; she blushed overpoweringly, meeting the eyes of the Gräfinn. She turned away towards the stage, but she was conscious of how the Gräfinn turned to Herr von Heilmann, touched his arm with her gloved hand, offered him her glass, and whispered some words in the ear inclined towards her. Then she was conscious that Herr von

Heilmann looked towards where she sat, as if for the first time. She turned to meet the look—she could not help it. With an air of grave respect, the master inclined his head to Annie as he declined the offered glass. No smile of his answered that which rippled all over the face of the Gräfinn.

After this, Annie neither saw nor heard much; she sat surrounded by a dream-atmosphere; between her and all she looked upon there was a haze. All colour and sparkle left her face; she was tired—very tired, she thought; she was glad when the curtain fell, and it all was over. In the corridor, after they had taken leave of their other friends, Basil having to take Annie back to the school, they met Herr von Heilmann. The Gräfinn, richly shawled, and her lovely face framed by a delicate white hood, was leaning upon his arm. He stopped to speak to Annie.

"You are tired with your day's pleasure, Fräulein," he said kindly. Then, with a

sterner air, "Did you know that I had changed my hour?"

"I did not know—I was going back for my lesson when I saw you."

"Good!" Then a moment's pause. "To-morrow at eight, if not too early an hour for you, I can give you the lesson you lost to-day."

Annie had no time to thank him, except by the light flashing all over her face. The Gräfinn murmured something of the draught from the staircase; with a bow he moved on. Annie and Basil, pushed by the crowd, for a moment followed them closely.

"Who is the charming Engländerinn?" asked the Gräfinn, her heart perhaps not at ease. Annie's face, all bright again, had looked too bewitching, shining out of the pale pink hood—a hood that had been lent her by Basil's fair friend; and Herr von Heilmann had looked too kindly upon that little face.

Annie heard the question, and she heard

the answer, paternally grave, stern in its earnest repression of any light comment such as that on which the Countess had before ventured.

"A favourite little pupil of mine—a dear child, of whom my mother is very fond."

Then Annie could hear no more, and could therefore attend to Basil. He was saying,

"Your music-master's wife is a very lovely creature, but, do you know, I think she is of a jealous temper. I think she is jealous of you, Annie. I saw her watching you perpetually, and she didn't seem to like his stopping to speak to you. The music-masters must have a fine time of it in this place. That woman looks like a born countess, at least, and her dress and jewels are magnificent."

"She is a 'born countess,' Basil—the Countess Rosalie von Thauenwald."

"Not Herr von Heilmann's wife?"

"Not Herr von Heilmann's wife."

"A widow?"

"Yes."

"She wishes to be his wife, then, I should say."

CHAPTER VI.

ANNIE hardly slept that night, the day had been one of so much excitement. She was up and in the music-room with the first light of morning. It was piercingly cold, and the stove was not lighted. For a long time it was in vain that she tried to get the stiffness out of her fingers.

As the clock struck eight, Herr von Heilmann came, the morning fog thickly beading his moustache and beard. Annie's music was open before her, seeing which, he said "Good," and she began at once.

He hardly had occasion to interrupt her. When she had finished, and turned to him timidly, she was met by a smile, very slight,

but kind and encouraging, and the words, "Right industriously studied."

That was praise enough to make Annie brighten all over. Herr von Heilmann was chary both of praise and blame, a man of few words. How well Annie remembered the first time she had played to him, and the mingled despair and ambition—despair of the present, ambition for the future—of which that first lesson had left her full.

After letting her play through the Sonata of Beethoven's which had been her ambitious choice then, he had said, with a grim smile,

"All that should be quite otherwise. Put it aside for the present; later, you may be able to understand it."

To-day Annie felt that her master was, on the whole, content with her; indeed, when the lesson was ended, he said as much. Then Annie tried to thank him for his "great goodness" in sparing her an hour when he was, she knew, so fully occupied.

She spoke rather blunderingly, and before she had finished what she had meant to say, she stopped suddenly, for she saw something in the listening face that made her fancy she was paining or displeasing her master. When she stopped, Herr von Heilmann continued silent for a moment. He had risen to go, and stood leaning one hand on the piano; his eyes, contracted in that manner peculiar to him, looked past Annie out of the window behind her, and he gnawed the ends of his moustache with an air of somewhat grim meditation.

"My mother gave to you, Fräulein, the message I left with her for you?" were his first words. He paused, so Annie answered, "Yes," in a voice scarcely audible, but which he caught.

"I think you can hardly have understood my message, or can hardly have given me credit for sincerity, if you talk of my 'great goodness' for you, because in so simple a matter I do not choose to see you treated

with injustice. I remind you of that message this morning, Fräulein, and beg you to credit its sincerity, because I now have a message to deliver from my mother to you. I demand your permission to repeat a word of warning from her to you on a subject which only one accredited as a friend, in a full sense, could be allowed to touch."

Annie flushed and trembled, but managed somehow to express that she was proud to have him for a friend, ready to listen to him or to his mother on any subject on which they wished to speak.

"I know not the custom in your England, Fräulein"—he spoke with hesitation, and studiously avoided looking at Annie's face, while some heat tingled into his own—"but here, in Germany, a young girl—ein junges Mädchen—does not before her betrothal appear in public alone with——. In short, to you, my Fräulein, a word is enough. I would not have allowed myself this freedom in addressing you had not the matter seemed

to me urgent, and had I not known that the Fräulein Grüppe neglects her duty towards you in many respects. Have I your forgiveness?"

Their eyes met now; his face betrayed the greater embarrassment, though hers was working with emotion.

"No," was her first word. She had meant to explain it by saying how strongly she felt his kindness—had even meant to explain the truth, though in her heart was a painful consciousness of the Gräfinn Rosalie, and a painful doubt as to whether it would not be more generous to her master to leave him in error; but these things were hardly recognised, and truth-speaking was a necessity of her nature. At that moment, just as that "no" had been uttered, Fräulein Grüppe entered the room. She had only just heard of Herr von Heilmann's presence in the house, and entered in a state of great excitement as to what it could mean.

Herr von Heilmann's explanation was

as brief and frigid as was consistent with his invariable courtesy. Fräulein Grüppe escorted him from the room and across the hall, half-deafening him with her exclamations about his great goodness. Having closed the door behind him, she passed into the empty refectory, and, pacing up and down, took counsel with herself. Should she or should she not dismiss Annie?—could she afford this gratification of her rage?—finally, would it be any gratification? What resource would then be open to the girl other than that of taking refuge with Frau von Heilmann, and to what might not that lead? This cousin—who she didn't believe was a cousin at all—if he would but take Annie off her hands! She must wait, she decided; wait and see if he showed any intention of doing so, meanwhile throwing the two together as much as possible.

Herr von Heilmann had forgotten one of his gloves—it lay upon the floor. Annie

did not notice it till a few minutes after he had left; she looked to see what it was she trod under her foot. Then she lifted it up, audibly expressed her sorrow that she had trampled upon it, shook the dust of the not yet swept floor from it, smoothed and stroked it; touched it with her cheek, finally with her lips; then, as the door behind her opened, she started guiltily, hid it under her little apron, turned and faced Herr von Heilmann: he had come to seek it.

What could she do? She had thought him already out of reach, or she would have sent after him. For a musician's hand to be gloveless in that climate on such a morning was no light matter, and Herr von Heilmann, she knew, inherited his mother's complaint—was often disabled by rheumatism. Then for so dear a hand to suffer through her fault! What could she do? While she thought, Herr von Heilmann, after a rapid glance round the room, a

word explaining what he sought, retired gloveless.

When the door had closed, Annie drew the treasure from its hiding-place, and ran after him. She held it to him without a word; he took it with only a bow. Did he suspect anything? No; he was far too grandly simple. He merely thought it strange he should have overlooked it.

Annie could eat no breakfast that morning, and again that night she had no sleep. She kept thinking over all that she wished she had said, fretting herself that she had not said it. She wondered, "If he had known that I kissed his glove, what would he have said? How would he have looked?" What would he have thought of her if he had known that, when he was in the house, she crossed the hall oftener than there was any need, just for the chance of being able, unobserved, to lay her hand with a caressing touch upon his fur coat? If he had seen her once,—when she had found it

thrown upon the ground—hold it a moment in her arms, burying her face in its soft warmth before she reverently restored it to its proper place!

Had Herr von Heilmann known these things, he might perhaps have hardly found them to his taste, but it is difficult to say how this would have been. He had on some subjects "old-fashioned" and "peculiar" notions. His ideal of womanhood he placed upon a pedestal; before it men were to bow down and worship. But the true knight-errantry in him modified the somewhat cold chivalry. A poor little friendless girl like Annie could hardly be put upon a pedestal for distant worship; if she was, she would feel herself placed in a very comfortless position. Did he not know this instinctively, and long to give her a warmer and lowlier place? When he sat beside her, formal, courteous, kind, was not this longing often very strong within him?

Perhaps Herr von Heilmann was one of

those men who, through their own high manhood, are enabled in their manner of loving, unconsciously to combine the worshipful reverence which the ideal of womanhood inspires in them, with the tender, protective tolerance for which the faulty weakness of the individual woman so largely calls. When the man loves in this sort, with what manner of loving can the woman most fitly answer his love?

Should not her life be one *unconscious* effort, by the intense and utter humility of her love and the religious devotion of her life, to raise herself towards less unworthiness of the higher and more abstract, while she is warmed, fed, and cherished by the dearer and more familiar half of this twofold devotion? And is it unbeautiful that an unreasoning fidelity of allegiance should endow with something of the dearness of the man who so loves her, all things that are or have been his?

CHAPTER VII.

"DO not expect much from it, my mother—not much fame or praise that will reach me in this world." Herr von Heilmann leant on the window near his mother's chair, which he had placed on her favourite estrade, in the brief wintry sunshine of the afternoon. It was the time of day when he always spent an hour with her. She had been talking of his opera—the labour of the best part of the last fifteen years of his life; a subject of which all the musical public of Wüstestadt was talking also, for it was now to be produced very shortly.

"Not that I call it 'music of the future;' to that school I do not, as you well know,

belong. Neither do I say that I think it has little merit. Had I thought so, I could not have laboured at it as I have done; I would not produce it as I am about to do. But its merit is of a quiet order, consistent and maintained. It is a result of much deep and vivid musical thought, focussed by intense concentration of purpose, and worked out with that 'patience' which one of your favourite French authors says is but another word for genius; and the possession of which is, perhaps, my only claim to the possession of genius. It has few, if any, "beauties" to become popular in the concert or reception-room. The harmony of just balance and fair proportion is not the beauty that will take the public. I have done what I could towards making it a perfect work of art; and, having striven so hard, I must have attained to something, though only Heaven knows how far I have fallen short of my ideal. And now, this is my prophecy concerning it—mark, my mother, and see if

it prove false—that it will fall flat; be, in fact, as regards its reception by the public, a failure. A few musicians, and a few musical critics, will recognise 'a something' in it of solid and ingrained merit, and the musical papers, those whose editors have not sworn allegiance to the new school, will here and there timidly suggest for it another hearing, while deploring that the stiff-necked classicality of its composer has hindered him from bowing in anything to the popular taste. So much for its present fate. As years go on it will be given another and another trial; and in the end, when I have long been dead, it will win for itself quiet recognition, and take its place among standard works of acknowledged merit."

"And if, my Gottfried, you expect no more than this, why all the labour of so many years?"

"I have done the work I felt called on to do in the way that it was truest to myself to do it; with the rest I have no concern."

"But if, my son, by a slight concession to the populace, you could have given them a work not beyond the possibility of their comprehension, and yet far enough beyond any practice of their lives to be for them raising and ennobling?"

"Mother, the artist should work only towards his ideal, looking neither before nor after, to the right nor left, straining towards it with every nerve and sinew. God only knows how far short even then he ever falls. As to results, with them he has nothing to do; they are in higher hands."

"You may be right in all, Gottfried; probably you are. I did not expect you to flash out upon the people like a firework and dazzle them half-blind; but I had hoped more than you tell me I shall see realised. If it is to be as you say, so best. Only, Gottfried, the old mother feels it a little hard; her greedy heart craves a little glory for her son." Gathering tears choked Frau von Heilmann's voice; they came hardly

and stingingly to one who so seldom wept; and at the sight of them her son was greatly moved. Stooping before her, he kissed one hand and then the other, one cheek and then the other, murmuring—

"Mother, my mother, I beg of thee"—(Mutter, meine Mutter, ich bitte dich). The words were nothing; the tone, of such deep and strong tenderness, was everything.

With a fervent blessing she flung her arms round his neck. Then she loosed him, pushed him away. "The old woman grows childish," she said, and resumed her knitting, while he resumed his former position, leaning in the window—savouring the bitterness failure would bring him in her disappointment.

It was some little time before the silence was broken; then it was by Frau von Heilmann asking sharply, "What ails my son?"

While her fingers had plied her needles, soothing him by the familiar click-clack, her eyes had watched his face; and now she saw

the contraction of the brow and the twitch of the mouth, which she understood right well.

"What ails my son?" she asked again, as he did not directly turn towards her, or answer. "What did you see? Whom are you watching?"

"The Fräulein Gresham passed down the garden avenue with her friend, the young Englishman of whom I told you."

"Alone with him?"

"Yes."

"You cautioned her, as I bade you?"

"I did."

"Then she's a worthless, head-strong girl."

"Softly, my mother. I am pained by her imprudence, but she is hardly to blame. Fräulein Grüppe drives her to the alternative of choosing between the society of her friend and the observance of foreign conventionalities. A girl too simple, sincere, and pure to be a prude, could hardly hesitate."

"Gottfried, you think she loves him, the young Englishman?" There was a twinkle of amusement in the mother's eye, a suppressed chuckle in her throat.

"I think so. I think, too, mother, that it is well she should. His is a trustworthy face; you may believe I studied it the first time I had the opportunity—that night at the opera; he is her own age, and of her own country. I often pitifully remember her answer once, long ago, when I ventured to ask her, seeing her look sad, was she home-sick; she said she did not know, she felt like it; but she did not see why she should have home-sickness, having no home in this world to be sick for. He will marry her, and take her home. Think of the dearness one's own tongue must have, heard in a foreign land—a dearness communicating itself to whoever speaks it. It is hardly likely he will not make her love him. I have much doubt if she would be happy sharing our life, my mother. It seems

natural and right that she should pine for her own land and her own people. I am grave and harsh, old enough to be her father almost; sometimes I think she is afraid of me. It would be best that she should love this young Englishman, and return to her own land."

"And you, my son? It is then with you —as I think the child suspects" (these words hardly audible)—"pity, paternal kindness —no more?"

"Your humour is somewhat mocking to-day, mother," Herr von Heilmann returned, with a glance of surprise. "With me and with you it will be as it has always been," he said, sadly. "I have my mother, I have my art; and you, you have your son; it will be with us as it has always been."

"Unless, indeed," said the mother, with a little scornful laugh, "the beautiful widowed Gräfinn should forcibly take possession of my son and leave me nothing. Well, Gottfried, the old woman thinks her own

thoughts, hopes her own hopes, and waits to see them realised. I shall have a daughter yet, and not a Gräfinn!"

"Your temperament is sanguine, mother."

"In that it is most unlike my son's."

A long pause.

Then Herr von Heilmann said, "Both her betrothal and her wedding must take place here, my mother; she has no other friends."

"Both shall take place here, then; if my son wills it, it must be so."

"I think, mother, if she does not come soon to see you, you had better send for her. There are many things of which it will be well that you should talk with her. She does not look well or happy; perhaps, the poor child, she is tormenting herself about her duty."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW days later Annie was kneeling before Frau von Heilmann, caressing her hands, with the words, "Once again,—at last! I thought the time would never come. It was very good of you to send for me; unless you had, I could not have got to you, and it seems so long, so long that I have not seen you."

"But Aennchen has found time to walk and take her pleasure with other friends!" the old woman answered, with some asperity. Then she took the small face between her hands, and her tone was softer as she said, "But my little one has not thriven upon her pleasure. What have these eyes been doing, child?" She might well ask; they

had wept themselves very dim. "And what has your heart been doing to make the poor cheeks so wan?"

"Breaking, perhaps," answered Annie, the words seeming to burst out unawares. Just then Herr von Heilmann entered, and Annie sprang up in visible, plainly visible, agitation.

"Gottfried will not stay long," said the mother; "he is very busy to-day with the rehearsal—for that he has put off all his lessons; but he means to give you yours here, in the evening—that is why I sent for you. The time is short now before the grand event, Aennchen, you know."

"Yes," murmured Aennchen.

Having seen her seated, Herr von Heilmann took up his usual position, leaning in the window, so appearing as if he had some intention of remaining.

"Fräulein Gresham will honour me by being present on the first night?" he asked, after he had answered a few questions of his

mother's about the one topic of all importance to her. "The first night may be the last," he added.

Annie was silent.

"You have a correct judgment, a pure taste, and a truthful tongue, Fräulein." He smiled as he named the last qualification. "I shall greatly value your unprejudiced opinion of my work."

"You do not think of being present," he asked, in a colder tone, as Annie still remained silent. Then she looked up into his face.

"If you will find me any little hole to creep into!" she began, with a flash of enthusiasm. Then she let her eyes fall, and explained, in a quiet tone, "Fräulein Grüppe says she cannot possibly find room for me."

She did not tell him that she had offered a year's salary for a ticket, and had, before Basil's departure made her again a prisoner, rambled over the town trying to procure one.

"Of course I have reserved places for my friends," Herr von Heilmann answered, the pleasant light shining in his eyes again. "If you will honour me by accepting tickets for three of these places, for yourself and two friends?"

"You are too good," cried Annie; "it did seem so hard not to be able to hear it!" she said, turning to the mother. "But I can only use one ticket. I have no friends. My cousin is gone to England, to be at home at Christmas."

These words, "England," "home," "Christmas," together with the thrill of joy that had been such a revulsion from the other thoughts filling her mind, were too much for Annie to-day; having uttered them in a choked voice, she burst into tears. There was so much pain in the poor little heart which could not be wept away, that grief such as tears could reach *would* pour itself out.

"Your cousin has left? You are alone

again!" Herr von Heilmann said, pityingly. Then, as he saw Annie's tears, and heard her convulsive sobbing, he moved to her side. He restrained himself, however, so far as to do no more than lay his hand lightly on her head, murmuring "Poor child! poor lonely little one!" Then, with the words, "Comfort her, mother—you best can; be very kind to her," he left the room.

Annie now flung herself at the mother's feet, and buried her face in her lap. Frau von Heilmann stroked her hair caressingly, but said nothing. It was Annie who first broke the silence. Lifting up her head suddenly, she asked—

"Does he think I am crying because Basil my cousin is gone?"

"It is likely enough he does, my little one!"

"No matter," murmured Annie, drying her eyes, and trying to choke back her sobs; "perhaps it is better he should think so. But do *you* think so?"

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Tell me, is it so?"

"No, no, no," sobbed Annie. "I began to cry, because—because I am so lonely, so miserable; because I could not help it. The thought of England and home, at this Christmas time, makes my heart sicken and sink. Last Christmas it was different; I had not then lost all. Was it wrong? Are you angry? My crying can do no harm. Is he angry?"

"It pained him, child—it pained Gottfried. If you knew him as I do, if you loved him as I do, you would think that was harm enough."

"I do think so—I will not do it again; but——" She paused, then with a great effort she said, "It was not only to have my lesson that you sent for me to-day—you are going to tell me something; but I know it—I think I know it."

"If so, we will speak of something else—of you, of your cousin. He comes back

again soon, I suppose—when, child? When he is here again, there must not be so much rambling about together—you must bring him here. Gottfried wishes it. Your friend must not be a stranger here. And then the betrothal—there must be one in our country fashion. It shall be here; Gottfried says so. He will be to you as father, friend, brother."

"Are you—is he—trying to break my heart?" cried Annie. She sprang up in a blaze of indignation, but it soon passed; she sank down again and moaned. "Forgive me. He is very good; you are very good. It is only I——" She wept again, and so convulsively now that Frau von Heilmann strove earnestly to soothe her.

"My child! my poor little one! speak to me. Trust me, tell me all!"

"I must—I must speak, I must tell you, or my heart will burst," gasped Annie. "Oh! I love him, I love him, so dearly, so dearly! I know it, now it is too late."

"Too late," echoed Frau von Heilmann, and over her face gathered a cloud. She spoke abstractedly as she said, "Too late! I do not suppose it is too late. Patience, child. He has gone, you say, but he will write; if he is worth having, he will ask you again. Patience, child. So he asked you, and you refused him; and now he is gone, your heart goes after him; for this I do not see that it need break."

In spite of herself, her tone was hard and taunting. After her confession, Annie had hidden her burning face; now she raised it, and its perplexity lightened that of Frau von Heilmann.

"You speak of your cousin,—is it not so, my child?"

"No," answered Annie. "It is best, perhaps, you should not understand. I ought not to have spoken, but you bade me, and my heart is so full. Let me go now, and —and——"

She tried to rise, but the old woman's

hands, pressing heavily upon her shoulders, held her down.

"You did not speak of your cousin? Töchterchen, is it Gottfried?"

The mother bent down, and the last words were whispered in the girl's ear.

"Yes, yes, yes. But I know, oh! I know it is too late. I wish—I wish I had not told you. I hope he will be happy; I will pray to God to make him so. She is so beautiful, and she looks kind and good."

"Of whom are you speaking, you poor child? And what do you mean by 'knowing it is too late?' And if you love Gottfried, who loves you, what are you breaking your poor heart about?"

"Is it not true, then? Is it not this you sent for me to tell me? Then, what *have* I done? Fräulein Grüppe told me that——"

"That?"

"That your son, my master, would in a

few months be married to the Gräfinn Rosalie von Thauenwald; that the betrothal was to be at Schloss Thauenwald, on the first day of next year."

"A lie—a cruel lie! It is about this the eyes have grown so dim, the cheeks so wan? Blessings on them, Aennchen mein! His mother has been hard upon you, vexed with you, that you tried him and pained him, and would not at once own that you loved him: his mother has been hard upon you. But, Tochterchen, you are, and will be, my Tochterchen. He loves you; not only, as you fancied, poor little one, out of pity and kindness, and in the spirit of self-sacrifice, does he desire to marry you; but he loves you with all that is best in love. His heart opens and closes with difficulty, my Aennchen; somehow you, the little stranger woman, got into it, and you are there for ever."

"He cares for me—for me! Oh, Mütterchen, are you quite, quite sure?"

"For you, and, in the same way, for no other."

"But—he seemed so ready to give me up—so pleased. What did that mean?"

"Ready he was, pleased even, because he thought you would so be happier. It means that he does not love with the self-seeking passion some men call love, but with a love the strongest desire of which is the good and happiness of what he loves. Yes, he was ready to give you up, so far as to be to you only a brother, a friend—whatever you most needed. But, as I said, you are in his heart for ever. Oh, he is good, he is noble, is my Gottfried. Thank God for his love, my daughter."

"Mother, I will. I will, mother. I do, I will—all the days of all my life."

"Gottfried!" the mother called, thinking she heard a movement in his room.

Annie buried her face in the mother's lap. Herr von Heilmann obeyed the summons. Did Annie ever forget how each

step of his, as he came towards them, echoed in her heart? What she felt was like dying into another life, she thought—dying from a dull, cold, loveless world into a world of love.

"Take this child, this little daughter of mine," Frau von Heilmann said. "Take her; she has been here long enough. Take her away, I say; she wearies me."

"Mother!"

"Take her away, I say!" she reiterated, in mock anger, while the tears began to stream down her face. "She is more yours than mine; why should I have all the burden of her? Take her; she wearies me."

Herr von Heilmann paused beside the little prostrate figure, and perused his mother's face.

"He does not believe his own old mother! Tochterchen, look up; speak to him."

Annie looked up; she spoke to him, but only with her eyes. It was enough. He

bowed down before his mother; the trembling hands were laid upon their heads; by both that blessing was felt to be the true betrothal.

Afterwards he tried to lift Annie from the ground. First she turned, and, bending low, laid her face upon his feet; afterwards she let him do with her what he would. Frau von Heilmann nodded approval.

"Right, right, my daughter," she said. "Gottfried, for that you shall not chide her. Right, right, Aennchen, true daughter of mine. 'A vos pieds et dans vos bras.' When I was a young woman—and I was thought to be a right proud one—I set my pride in this, that no man should ever hold me in his arms whose feet I did not feel that I could kneel and kiss. I did not marry very early. He was rather long in coming—the man towards whom I could feel thus. He did come, however, and he was your father, my son—a father of whom my son is almost worthy."

When Herr von Heilmann's opera was produced, it fared a little better than he had prophesied for it, yet not much. But it was well given, and he saw and heard it with his little betrothed bride at his side—his little betrothed bride, whose heart he now knew to be so wholly, so humbly, so wonderingly, his; to whom his love was all-sufficing; who walked softly in the light of the new knowledge of its depth and strength, feeling that it made all places holy, all life sacred.

To a man the happiness of love cannot, and should not, be all-sufficing as to a woman; yet to Herr von Heilmann it was very full and satisfying, making him feel that he could afford to bear all things, even to the disastrous damning with faint praise of his timid friends. He was calmly content; not that his work should die and be forgotten, but that it should bide its due time for such recognition from posterity as its intrinsic merit could justly claim: happily not sharing

the opinion of the French cynic who pronounced—"La postérité n'est pas autre chose qu'un public qui succède à un autre."

As for Frau von Heilmann—the little one, as she is called in Wüstestadt, happy still to need some such distinctive title—let any who can, doubt of her happiness: the writer of this bit of her story is not one of that number! She is by no means an idle little woman; she is proud to share her husband's labour, happy to know that she lightens it. Annie had played, and played wonderfully well, at that school-concert in her maiden days. Frau von Heilmann has played to larger and more critical audiences some few times, when he has been incapacitated by sudden attacks of his Winter enemy, fulfilling for her husband his engagements to play in public.

On one of these occasions the writer of this small portion of her story last saw her. It was a pretty and pleasant sight; for be-

side the lovely little childlike woman, whose small fingers did marvels of delicate and intelligent execution, stood the husband, stiff and soldier-like, following the movements of those fingers with unremitting attention; and when all was over, it was to him she turned, looking up into his face with eyes that asked plainly as eyes could speak—"Master, have I done well? Husband, are you pleased with me?" The answer in his face left nothing doubtful. It was easy enough to see how completely Annie was mistress of the heart of him she still loved, honoured, and revered as her *Master.*

GURTHA.

GURTHA.

CHAPTER I.

PETCOWRIE COVE is on the north coast of Cornwall, far westward, and near the Land's End. It is floored with the richest red-gold-hued sand, and is shut in by rocks jutting so far into the sea, as not, even by the lowest ebb, ever to be left dry-footed. In the centre of the Cove, the grassy crest of the cliff dips down to within a few yards of the shore. Some roughly-cut steps make those few yards pretty easy of ascent and descent. From the top of

them, a winding track leads inland, past a single cottage, snugly sheltered, and better built and cared for than most of those along that coast, over furzy and heathery moorland, to the back of a bleak, grey old Grange, standing about a mile and a half from the Cove. Almost directly opposite Petcowrie Cove, there is a small island, some few miles out to sea, rocky and precipitous, where the sea-birds congregate by thousands.

A boat drawn up under the cliff on the eastward-facing curve of the bay, and nets spread near it, to catch the early morning sun, told of the occupation of the inhabitants of that solitary cottage.

Summer was getting towards Autumn. At five o'clock the sun was just rising. From that eastward-facing curve, you could see it leap out of the sea, strike towards you a path of fire, touching the fringed crests of the freshened waves; deepen the red-gold hue of the sand, and make all the

pools it touched in the hollows of the rock look like bowls of ruby wine.

At this hour a young fisherman came down to the Cove; a singularly handsome, honest-faced fellow; tall, strong, and of fearless carriage. A few moments he looked round him with an intelligent air of keen enjoyment, then, seating himself by his upturned boat, taking a book from his pocket, and laying it down beside him, open, he occupied himself about equally in mending his nets and in conning some lesson. Yet, diligently as he was thus occupied, he often, after the first hour, sent a half-expectant, half-impatient look in the direction of the steps.

Nobody came down them for that hour and more. He gave up glancing at his book, and fell to low, melancholy whistling. By-and-by, when somebody did come, he, though quite aware of it, only whistled louder and more gaily, and bent more intently over his work.

A young girl, rather handsome than beautiful, with the sort of face that not even the first bloom of youth and the roundness of perfect health can make soft in expression or outline, but with glowing, passionate, dark eyes, came up to where the young man sat, and stood watching him.

There was a wild, neglected air about her; she had on a frock of delicately-coloured, glistening silk, unfit for the time or place, and several costly jewelled ornaments, but her dress was untidy and unfinished; she wore no lace or muslin, no gloves, or any little feminine niceties of toilet. Her hair floated loose on the morning wind in heavy dark curls, a plumed riding-hat dangled from one hand, and in the other she had a number of shabby and tattered books.

"Well, Michael," she said at last, when he had shown no consciousness of her presence, though she had stood by him some seconds.

"Good morning, miss." He shaded his eyes with his hand, looking up at her. She was then gazing out to sea.

"How nice it is here, this morning!" she exclaimed—"so merry and bright!" Then, looking down on him, "Do you know your lessons, Michael? Have you been a good boy?"

"I wish you had come an hour sooner, Miss Gurtha; I knew my lessons well then; now, I'm afraid, I've forgotten them."

"Why, you foolish old Michael, you've got to learn for all your lifetime, not for one hour. I've got more books, you see, and I'm going on with your education in real good earnest."

He looked at her with a dazzled sort of indulgent grin, that showed a perfect set of strong white teeth.

"Bless you, Miss Gurtha, but it's a tough job you'll have of it: schoolmaster never could get me past what he called the rudimentals—never could make a scholar of me."

"But you'll take more pains to please me, Michael, than you ever took to please that crabbed old schoolmaster."

"That's true, Miss Gurtha.—Wait a minute!" he cried, as she was about to sit down on the sand beside him. "The tide's not been off it long—it's wet enough yet to spoil that grand gown."

He took a new red cushion out from under his boat, where it had lain wrapped round in his pea-jacket, and put it down for her.

"That's new, Michael. How nice!"

"I got it made for you to use, miss, when you honour my boat. But I've been thinking, Miss Gurtha, as how it's likely enough that you'll get into trouble with your brother if he comes to know the way you condescend to a poor fisherman, now you're grown up into a lady." This was said with a reddening face and downcast air.

"What's put this into your head, Michael?"

"Some idle words I heard the other day made me begin to think of it."

She put one of her small brown hands on his big brown hand.

"Good old Michael! But my brother neither knows nor cares anything about me. You're my only friend; you're the only person in the whole world who is ever kind to me now. I think I hate Edgar! I'm pretty sure I do!"

"Oh, Miss Gurtha, that isn't a pretty thing for a lady, let alone a sister, to say!"

"Nor yet to feel."

"Nor yet to feel."

"For all that, I do say it, and I do feel it, and I don't tell lies about it!"

"I don't *love* your brother myself, Miss Gurtha."

"I wonder who does!—a nasty, mean fellow!"

"That's where it is. He is mean, and I never could put up with meanness. He cheated me out of the prize at the July

rowing-match by the dirtiest of tricks—such a trick as I wouldn't play upon anyone, though I'm but a poor fisherman, while he calls himself a gentleman. But I oughtn't to say this to you, Miss Gurtha."

"You're more of a gentleman than he is, Michael—a thousand times more! Do you know, Michael, I told him how meanly I thought he had served you?"

"Did you, Miss Gurtha?"—with an admiring stare. "What did he say?"

"Things I wouldn't repeat—and—he boxed my ears!"

Her face grew scarlet; his reflected the colour.

"He boxed your ears, did he?"—repeated slowly, with clenched hands and set teeth. "I wish I was a gentleman!"

"You're better as you are, Michael; better than any gentleman I ever met. But now we mustn't talk any longer; now to lessons."

When they came to apply themselves to

the more abstruse part of their studies, the teacher was as perplexed how to teach as the pupil how to learn: the two handsome heads were bent close together in praiseworthily earnest effort to master difficulties, till, by-and-by, Gurtha looked up and asked,

"Where was it you told me you had seen such fine sea-flowers, Michael?"

That proved an irresistible challenge. The rest of the morning was spent in searching for sea-anemones, rare weeds, and shells, while the abandoned books fluttered their leaves in the wind. The delicate silk gown was greened with weed, splashed with spray, torn with sharp points of the rock, and plastered with sand. When Gurtha at last remembered how long she had been down in the Cove, and spoke of returning to the Grange, Michael made futile attempts to rub her dress clean with his handkerchief —a fine one, and a white one, one of half-a-dozen which Gurtha had bought for him out of her scanty pocket-money, and hemmed,

at the cost of blood, with her own inexperienced fingers.

"I've had such a nice morning. It's glorious down here! I wish I could be a sea-fairy, and never need go back to that gloomy grey lump up there! But to-morrow, Michael, we must be really industrious, or you never will get on."

"You can't carry those creatures home so, Miss Gurtha."

"You must bring them up to me this evening, in a can of water; and if you can find any of those crimson ones we saw the other day——"

"You shall have them."

He sprang up the steps in the rock before her, held out his hands for hers, and pulled her up.

"How strong you are!" she said admiringly. "It's like pulling by the rock itself."

She tied on her hat, and began to run homeward. He watched till she was out of sight.

The person at the Grange who was supposed, since a young woman who had been her governess had mysteriously disappeared, to exercise supervision of its young mistress, was the old housekeeper; she was deaf, infirm from age and disease, and now and again utterly senseless and helpless from the effects of drink.

This morning she received the girl as usual, with a scolding for running wild, nobody knew where, and for spoiling her best frock: and Gurtha paid the usual amount of heed. She tossed her hat down on the oak settle in the black old hall, made an attempt to smooth her hair with her hands, and went at once into the gloomy chamber, low, oak-raftered, oak-wainscoted, and oak-floored, which was called the breakfast parlour, where the meal was served which was her brother's breakfast, her lunch, and always, when he did not dine at home, her dinner too.

She was glad to find that he was not

there before her. The long room had a north window towards the sea, opening into a stable-yard, in which were many dog-kennels; a south window, opening into the churchyard, where the sheep kept the grass short-cropped. A great fire was blazing in it, and after the pure brisk sea-air, the atmosphere seemed oppressive. She flung the north window wide open—from which she could see and hear the sea; but such an odour of pig-sty, stable, and dog-kennel, such a grunting, neighing, and yelping came in, that she closed it, and tried the other. She was leaning out of it, watching the sheep browsing among the gravestones, when a coarse voice called to her, "Shut that window, and come to breakfast. What's the use of a fire if you set windows open?"

She obeyed the order, and then approached the speaker, a sallow, black-haired and bearded, heavy-browed young man, who stood shivering over the fire.

Edgar Trestrail was only eight-and-

twenty, little more than ten years older than his sister; but self-indulgence and intemperance had given him a bloated look, that made him appear at least forty.

"Good morning, Edgar."

He gave her a nod, then asked, "Is breakfast ready?"

"I believe so."

"Pour out my tea, then.—Not made?" as he saw her take up a teapot which proved to be empty. "That's just like you. —Where have you been all the morning?"

"I've been down to the Cove," she answered, surprised by a question which showed an unusual interest in her doings.— "Why do you want to know?"

"I'll tell you why I want to know"—he spoke savagely. "I heard something, somewhere, the other day, that didn't please me. I'm going to change all that, to put an end to your low *friendships*. I'm going to send you to school!"

"To school! Why, I'm grown up."

The passionate blood mounted to her temples.

"I know that only too well, and I don't know what to do with you. I must somehow get you made something like a lady."

"I am a lady!"

"Are you? You'll need to be labelled as such, then! No one will suspect you of it, unless they're told." He stepped back from her, and surveyed her, a glass stuck in his eye. "Who ever saw a lady dressed as you are now? A fine silk gown, torn and dirty, rough hair, no collar, hands not over-clean.—You should see how the Misses Garstone look when they come down to breakfast in the morning!—It's not an infant school or a village school I'm going to send you to, child," he said, sitting down to the table. "You are to go to Paris. Sending you away will be the kindest and wisest thing I've ever done for you, Gurtha, and I hope you'll be grateful."

"I won't go to Paris—I won't go to

school anywhere! It will be shameful of you to send me, now I am grown up."

"Grown-up ladies don't stamp and scream."

"I won't go," she repeated.

"You *shall* go," he affirmed, in a quiet way, that made her feel he meant it.

"Dead, then. I won't go alive, so take care, sir."

He changed his tone.

"Well, well, perhaps I was joking. Be a good girl, and give me my tea. There, there, it shan't go if it doesn't like."

He put his hand on her head as she came near him, giving him his cup. She shook it off, and looked at him very steadily. His eyes shifted away from her look.

"You can't deceive me, Edgar, and I'd rather have you swear at me and strike me (for then I don't so much despise you), than pretend kindness, and tell me lies."

"Little minx! you talk of despising me,

do you? However, I'm not going to quarrel with you."

Directly he had breakfasted, Mr. Trestrail prepared for riding. His horse was already at the door.

"I shan't be back to dinner, tell old Howes; probably I shan't be back till late in the evening."

"You promised to take me to the Witches' Stone to-day. If you won't let me ride there with you, I will ride there by myself."

"Witches' Stone!—you're witch enough already. Moreover, last time I did take you out with me, I was so ashamed of you that I vowed you shouldn't go again till you've been civilised. Your habit was torn, your gloves were split, your collar was loose, your hair flying, and your hat half off—and we met the girls from Chevala, and that prim prig, young Garstone."

Gurtha, reminded of this, blushed with mingled anger and shame. She had felt

the difference between herself and those pretty girls, in their perfect-fitting habits, with their hair neatly rolled away under becoming hats, with their graceful veils, snowy gloves and collars, and dainty little whips. She had resented their gaze, and that of their brother; and when the latter spoke to her, kindly and courteously, she had answered as if she felt herself insulted. Poor Gurtha! That gaze which she had resented, especially from Mr. Garstone, had been one partly of pity and curiosity, but more than half of admiration. She had looked splendidly handsome in a rich, glowing, gipsy fashion, after her wild ride; but she was quite unconscious of this, and felt as if they looked at her as they might have done at some curious, half-savage creature.

Why had not her brother noticed the faults of her toilette before she went out, instead of abusing her so coarsely afterwards? Because he did not care about her for herself, only about what people would

think of him if she looked neglected. Till these Garstones came to Chevala, and were occasionally to be met with in their rides, he had never bestowed a critical glance upon his sister, or spent a word, good or bad, on her dress.

Gurtha thought of this as she watched him ride away. When she came back into the house it wasn't much past noon. How was she to amuse herself all the rest of the day? She was not often at a loss. She got the torn habit and split gloves, and tried to mend them; but they seemed to grow worse, instead of better, under her awkward big needle. She gave up the attempt in despair, and said,

"Edgar *shall* give me money to buy new things; I won't have those Garstones despising me. I'll get Michael to sell my watch and chain, and some of my bracelets and brooches, for me, if Edgar won't give me the money. But it's disgraceful if he doesn't! If I knew where he kept it, I'd

take some, for some of it's mine. And he spends it all on himself! I know he gave one hundred and fifty guineas for his horse, and he loses hundreds at cards; and he owes his London tailor and his Paris boot-maker hundreds—the ugly puppy! Now, does he really mean to send me to school? I think not, for it will cost him money; but I can't be sure, since he knew those Gar-stones. He wants them to think well of him—and perhaps Mrs. Garstone has ad-vised him to send me away. But I won't go—he shan't send me—I'll run away. Michael shall take me off in his boat, and put me out somewhere where no one knows me. I'll tell Michael, and we'll make a plan, and be ready for the worst."

Reminded of Michael, she got those tat-tered old school-books, and began to try to revive her acquaintance with them, learning the lessons to-day that she meant to teach Michael to-morrow. By-and-by she dropped the books, and strolled out. Sitting down

in the churchyard, she began pondering. What would her life be like? Would it always go on like this? She had little to complain of, she thought—perfect health and perfect liberty made her look brightly on things. She did not have much love or care spent on her; but then she had never been used to them. Edgar hated the old Grange. Perhaps he would marry a rich lady, and go away to live. She should be quite happy then! Perhaps, some day, some one would want to marry her. But no; that did not seem likely. Mr. Garstone (to whom she fancied she had taken a violent dislike) had risen in her mind when she thought of an imaginary bridegroom, and him, she felt sure, she should never marry. No, she should not marry; she should live alone at the Grange, and try to be good and kind to the poor people up in the villages; and then, if she stayed at the Grange, and did not marry, she should not have to part from her dear, good old

Michael. She was sitting in the afternoon sun while she thought these thoughts; with that sunshine, the free expanse of moorland, and the pure light air all round her, it did not occur to her that there was anything dismal in such a prospect.

Just before dusk, she was called to speak to Michael; he had brought her some of the sea-creatures she so especially wanted, as well as those they had found in the morning.

"Oh! what beauties," she cried, frisking about him. "You kind Michael—you dear Michael! bring them in!—bring them in!"

"I'd rather you'd take them from me here. I've no fancy to pass over your brother's threshold."

"It's no more his than mine, and I invite you to come in, sir. You won't see his ugly face—he's not at home—I hope you don't expect me to carry that big can!"

"No, Miss Gurtha; but you have servants."

"And you are one of them. Come, follow me."

With the air of a queen she led the way into a little room with a big west window, that opened out of the breakfast-parlour—a room that had a fine marine smell, from the number of marine curiosities kept there. She made him fill two glass-bowls from his great can, and then the new treasures were put into them.

A last beam of the setting sun touched the rich colours of some fine and rare anemones, and her eyes sparkled with delight as she looked at them, he watching her in entranced admiration. By-and-by she got down some mouldy, old-fashioned volumes of natural history, and read to him an account of the newly-arrived creatures.

After a little, when he had forgotten all the uneasiness his position as a guest under his enemy's roof caused him, and they two were leaning together in the window, she turned to graver talk.

"Michael, what do you think of my being sent away to school—quite away—to another country—to France?"

He turned pale.

"Don't you mind," she said, patting his hand reassuringly; "I won't go—I won't. I am grown up, and I won't be sent to school as if I were a baby. I won't. Edgar may kill me, but he'll find I won't go alive."

"Miss Gurtha," said the young man, speaking thick and hurriedly, "don't talk like that about being killed. There are ways without dying."

"I know there are, Michael. I only said that to show how much in earnest I was."

"You have only to speak the word, and I'll see who'll send you anywhere you don't choose to go!"

"I know you are always my friend, Michael."

"Always," he answered, and clutched the hand held out to him.

They talked the matter over a good while longer, and then she went with him to the door opening upon the yard.

While they stood there still talking, Mr. Trestrail rode clattering into the yard.

"I might have known he'd be back early, since he said he'd be late.—But don't mind him, Michael."

"I say, fellow, what are you doing here?" called out Mr. Trestrail, as he caught sight of young Petcowrie's unmistakable form striding from the house.

The young man so addressed stopped, turned, and came close to the speaker.

"Have you anything to say to me, Mr. Trestrail?" His tone was in no way insolent, but very self-respecting.

"I asked what was your business here, my good fellow."—When the two were at such close quarters, Mr. Trestrail's tone wonderfully softened.

"To bring Miss Gurtha some sea-flowers."

"Has Miss Trestrail paid you for them? For my part, I think she has enough of such rubbish already. But since you have brought them, you must have something for your trouble. Here,"—flinging half-a-crown down on the stones, and turning away.

"Mr. Trestrail." The man addressed stopped, and looked round.

Young Petcowrie's handsome eyes rested steadily, not on Mr. Trestrail's eyes, for they shifted away, but on his face, for a few moments; then he kicked the coin towards him, and said: "Do you think I'd take money from you!" and strode off.

"Did you pay that fellow for his trash, Gurtha?" Mr. Trestrail demanded of his sister. "He wouldn't take the money I offered him."

"I pay Michael money! No, indeed."

"Not money; then, perhaps"—very insolently—"you paid him in some other way."

"Michael is a friend of mine; he wanted no payment but my thanks." She did not

fully understand his insolence; she was too simple.

"Miss Trestrail must learn a better discretion in the choice of her friends; must be taught a truer estimate of her position.—Gurtha, you've got to make up your mind to the school-plan," he added, relaxing to a coarser and more natural manner. "Like it or not, you go, and soon. It's high time you had less liberty. Mrs. Garstone of Chevala thinks I am quite right in sending you."

"You have been talking me over with the Garstones!"

"Yes, and giving you a true character—not, I am sorry to say, a pretty one!"

"I'll not go—I'll not go—I'll not go!"

"You shall go—you shall go—you shall go!"—mimicking her tone and gesture.

She suppressed her rage, and said no more then. She even, before going to bed, held out her hand, wishing him good-night.

"Faugh, girl! you smell like an old fish-

wife. A fishwife you perhaps think to be, but I tell you you are mistaken, and I advise you, for the little time you stay at home, to keep that fish-fellow at a distance, or——"

She was standing temptingly near him, as he sat crouching over a great fire; she struck him a sharp light blow of her open hand across his face, and then waited.

He sprang up with a fearful oath, but she did not shrink or quail. He controlled himself, and sank languidly back in his chair again. "Little fury! little gipsy! little devil! But I'll find a way to tame it; I'll have it broken in," he said. Those words, spoken between his teeth, and the expression in his eyes as he spoke them, frightened her, and stung her as no blow would have done. It wouldn't have been new to her to feel the weight of his hand; she had often provoked him to strike her.

CHAPTER II.

THE history of Michael Petcowrie (he had been named after the Cove near which he was found) was this: He was the only human being saved from a vessel lured ashore and lost by wreckers' signals. He was adopted by an old man and woman who had lost seven sons at sea, and he grew up to know them as grandfather and grandmother. When found, they guessed him to be about three years old. He spoke some foreign tongue, which no one in those parts could understand, not even the doctor or the parson, and which, of course, he soon forgot in learning that spoken round him. He proved a good lad, was a

good grandson to them, worked well for them, kept them in comfort. They had been dead now about a year, the old woman dying three days after the old man. They had left the cottage and a hundred pounds or so, which they had saved, to Michael.

The old woman had been foster-mother to Gurtha's mother (to whom the Grange had belonged), who had grown up in much such a neglected manner as Gurtha, and had made an imprudent marriage. Her husband had deserted her soon after Gurtha was born; had been lost on the voyage to Australia, for which place he had started in the company of another woman, and with all the money of which he could rob his wife, who died of something that might have been called a broken heart. From the earliest years of her childhood, Gurtha had been in the habit of toddling down to granny's cottage; and at these times she had often been solemnly confided to Michael's

care, to be amused on the beach, or, occasionally in calm weather, taken out in a boat. Now, Michael was placed in circumstances of peculiar temptation. He loved Gurtha.—Well, of course, he did; he had loved her since she was a baby. Yes; but in what fashion, and how strongly he loved her now, he was only just beginning to find out. He hated Edgar. He had more than one good excuse—if any excuse for hatred can be good—for that; he had been played by him more than one ill turn and shabby trick. The simultaneous gratification of this love and this hate was, he believed, in his power. He had no thought that dishonoured Gurtha; the bewildering temptation that dazzled him had for sole end and aim the making her his wife, in order that no other man should have the power to take her away from him. Of Gurtha's liking, affection, love for him, he could have no doubt. He was very simple and inexperienced, unread in romances, and un-

learned in life; between love and love he did not distinguish. Whether that very love which delighted him, which was made up of the love of a sister for a kind brother, of an unloved girl for her one friend, and, unconsciously, of a superior for an inferior, would not shut him out from being the object of any other love from her, he never asked himself. That this might be so, he had no suspicion. He had always treated her with chivalrous respect, not designedly or consciously, so much as from instinct and innate honour. He had loved upwards, never forgetting that she was 'a lady.' He had never claimed the privileges of a brother; he had never kissed her, or been kissed by her since she was a tiny child, that *would* be carried in his arms, and *would* clasp him round the neck. Even then, he had been reverent in his caresses.

Now the time seemed come when all must change, when he must give up any love, or have all. He knew enough of the

world to know that the girl who left the Grange for a foreign school, could never return to it. She would no longer be the Miss Gurtha who loved him; she would be a fine lady, just like another fine lady; kinder and freer, perhaps, but it would, from the very nature of things, be out of all question that she would love him. She would have friends who would not deign speak to a common fisherman; she would have lovers in her own rank of life. That was the intolerable thought.

Should he let her go? That was to say, could he give her up for ever? He believed he had the power to keep her. To let her go, would be to give up both revenge and love, all he held dear in life—all he had to hope for—all he had to live for. He could never, he firmly believed, take up with any woman of his own position—any strapping fishing lassie, after having loved a lady. If he did let her go—if he did thus give up everything—what should he

do it for? Her good? He could not see any good that *could* come of it to her. He did not believe any man would love her as he did. He would serve her as if he were her slave; he would treat her as if she were his queen. (Poor fool! so ignorant of women as to think that a way to make a woman happy!) And then, if he let her go, what suffering *must* come of it to her! Taken away from the sea she loved so, shut away from the sunshine and the sky, deprived of liberty and the free use of her limbs—suffering that perhaps would kill her. He knew what home-sickness was, and could recall the ache of it; for once he had been sent away to the south coast for a pilchard fishing-season, and he hadn't been able to bear it; but before a week was out, being sent for ice, he had run away from the master he had been put under, and walked home. It would end in her running away; and then, she being so beautiful a young lady, and the people in foreign parts, as he

had heard, so wicked, what would that end in? He savagely kicked the stones out of his path, asking himself again, why and for what he should give her up? Difference of rank! Her mother had been a lady for certain, but her father? Then, as to his own rank—who could tell but that his blood was as good as hers! and it was blood the gentry swore by. Times and times, his old granny had told him how she believed he was born of gentle folks—if there were gentle folks in the parts he had come from—because of the fine linen that was round him when he was picked off the wreck; for that matter, there were the things in the old chest still, where anybody might see them. Poor old granny! She had always been looking for a king, a queen, or a prince to come and claim him.

Young Petcowrie knew, as all the country knew, that Gurtha Trestrail had money of her own; this would help to smooth difficulties, enabling her to live always as a

lady, which he should otherwise have been puzzled, perhaps, to enable her to do out of his earnings as a fisherman; this would also heighten the taste of his revenge; for he knew, as all the country also knew, that the young squire wasted his substance with riotous living, and could ill afford to let his sister's fortune pass out of his hands. But to do Michael justice, this money of Gurtha's threw no weight into the scale. He was not covetous: he had never known the pinching poverty that makes one feel what is called the real need of money, and had not the education, the refined and superfine civilisation, that creates so many unreal and artifical needs, which money must supply. He was in love, worshipfully in love. Gurtha herself—the certainty of possessing her—the right of protecting her—seemed to him over-sufficient reward for superhuman deeds and sacrifices, had such been in his power. That night, and two or three successive nights, young Petcowrie

tossed about on a sleepless bed; two or three successive mornings, the earliest glimmer of dawn found him out on the bay. The weather during those days was stormy and wet, but that did not seem to him a sufficient explanation why Gurtha, who loved to brave all weathers, and in some of her moods liked the worst weather best so long as she was out in it, did not come near the Cove. Had she been sent away already, by force? Of an evening, he lurked about the Grange, dodging Mr. Trestrail (whom he often saw limping about, as if he had met with some accident), and trying to get a glimpse of Gurtha. On the fourth evening, he saw her, sitting in the fire-lighted parlour, drooping, he thought; but, however, she was not gone, so he went home comforted.

Next morning, Gurtha came down to the Cove—not so early as usual. He was home from his fishing, had "cleaned himself up a bit," and was gardening in the plot of ground before the cottage, when he saw

Gurtha coming along the moorland track.

"Come down on the sands; I want to talk to you," she said in passing.

He lingered behind, to wash the mould off his hands, and to gather for her some fine rich-scented carnations, then he joined her.

They walked up and down while they talked, and Gurtha put her hand on his arm. Michael felt himself a gentleman, and looked one with that kingly carriage of his.

"He's been at home all day—all the days since I saw you last; he hurt his foot the very next morning. He has been always watching me—that's why I've not been down before. I've not brought the books to-day, for I can't stop long, and I want to talk to you seriously, Michael—very seriously indeed."

"If you'd stayed away a bit longer, Miss Gurtha, I can't say what I mightn't have done. Life's not worth having without you."

"You can't do without your tyrant, and I can't do without my slave—that's it, isn't it, Michael?"

"That's about it, Miss Gurtha. Now about the school?"

"Why, Michael, he really means to send me, I find. It's very serious. I won't go; on that I'm determined; and I don't want to die. It's all very well talking of dying, Michael, when you don't think what the words mean; but when one does think of what they mean, of what dying is—not feeling the sunshine any more, or the wind any more, or the dash of the sea-spray; not feeling the smooth sand or the springy moor under one's feet any more; not smelling the honey of the heather-blossoms any more, or the rich, fruity odour of the gorse; not watching the flight of the sea-birds, or the swell or the roll of the waves; not feeling the water dance under our dancing boat, Michael, or feeling the flying of my poor *Corsair;* not feeling any more, ever, any of

these things; but, instead, lying up there in the churchyard, under the weight of the damp ground, among the worms and the slimy, creeping, and crawling things——"

"Miss Gurtha, dying isn't only that, you know."

"Isn't it?" she said with a reckless laugh. "I *don't* know that it isn't only that, Michael—you don't know—none of us know. Perhaps it would be better for most of us if it were only that. But we don't know, I tell you, Michael, and our parson, who pretends to know, knows no more about it than the rest of us. Is he readier to die than the rest of us? He should be, if he believes what he tells us to believe. Think what a coward he proved himself in that storm last Winter, Michael, when you were so brave! And, again, when that accident happened in the mine, and you risked your life to save others, he, poor wretch, couldn't be coaxed into going down, when all was safe, to speak a little comfort to the poor man who was

dying there, and couldn't be brought up! I have always felt wickeder at church than anywhere else, since that, Michael. If I once know that a man is a coward, I lose all trust in him, all respect for him; when I hear our parson preaching difficult things that he never dreams of practising, it puts me past my patience, so that I can hardly help throwing the books at him, or calling him names! Suppose some morning I do something of that sort—you won't speak to me any more, I suppose?"

"Miss Gurtha, Miss Gurtha!" Michael's voice was a voice of reproof, but his face had kindled to a broad smile.

"Besides, I don't think *I* should be any more willing to die, Michael, if I did believe all he says. It doesn't seem a bit likely that a bad girl such as I am should turn into an angel all at once, and go straight to heaven; but even if I knew I should, if heaven is the sort of place our parson makes it out, I think it will be very

dull and tiresome: I think it is much nicer here.—Sitting on the clouds and singing hymns! Hymns are so ugly. The noise of the sea on the rocks is much prettier, I'm sure!"

"Miss Gurtha," said Michael, laughing outright, "if you go on like that, I shall be almost obliged to believe that you are what you called yourself, though what no one else shall call you in my hearing."

"A bad girl? Oh, I am a bad girl: sometimes I am sorry, but not often. Sometimes I think I shouldn't be wicked any more, if I got away from Edgar: he makes 'my angry passions rise' in an awful way; and if there is a devil, I wonder he doesn't come and fetch me some dark night, as nurse used to say he would, if I got into such passions."

"The sin's his, not yours, my pretty: your soul is as white—as—the foam there. It's not you the devil will fetch.—But about this going to school, Miss Gurtha"——

"About this *not* going to school, Mr.

Michael? How is it to be managed?—Michael, are you cold? Are you ill? You are shaking"——

"Your fancy, Miss Gurtha.—But about this going to school, I think, Miss Gurtha, you should go: I think you had better go." This was spoken heroically. Was it the girl's clinging confidence in him—the same thing that made him feel "like a gentleman"—that gave him courage? Five minutes before he had not meant to speak in this way. He went on more and more earnestly, the ice once broken. "I suppose, Miss Gurtha, that there's many things that ladies learn that you don't know as yet. If only you'd try school for a bit—if, after all, you found you couldn't do with it, you'd only have to drop me a line, and wouldn't I come quick and fetch you?—No running away by yourself, Miss Gurtha, remember! But you'd like it, perhaps, after the first. You'd get friends, Miss Gurtha—ladies like yourself—and, may be,

by-and-by, fine gentlemen as lovers." Saying the last word, he looked at her furtively. She was all blank amazement.

"*You* turn against me like this, and side with Edgar! What do I want with fine ladies or gentlemen, friends or lovers? I want my liberty.—Michael, school is prison. You don't know what school is, or you wouldn't speak as you've done. School would kill me. You'd feel no worse if you were put into prison than I should do at school."

"But if you'd try and bear it, just for a bit; you'll get liberty enough afterwards, you know. I'm sure, Miss Gurtha, that this is the rightest thing your brother has done by you. It's what he ought to have done years ago."

"When I was a child, I mightn't have minded it so much. But to be treated like a child now—I won't bear it; I can't, and I won't."

"Bless you, Miss Gurtha, what age are

you now? Nothing but a child yet, to speak the truth!"

"Michael!" she said, drawing away from him, for the moment mortally offended, "I thought you loved me; I thought you were a true friend; I thought I could always count on you; I thought you would never desert me."

"I'm a truer friend in saying this than I've been to you ever in anything before," he said ruefully.

"You're not, you're not! You *promised* to help me, and now, when I really want help, you desert me.—I tell you what will be the end of it, Michael: I shall drown myself; you will find me drowned, and then, I hope, you will be sorry." Covering her face with her hands, she burst into a passion of crying. Since she was a child, he had never seen her shed a tear.

"Miss Gurtha," he said tenderly, and laid his hand on her arm. "Don't, for God's sake, don't; I can't bear it."

She shook off his hand.

He watched her some time, his face working convulsively—then he seized her wrist. This time she let him touch her, but she resisted his efforts to draw her hand from her face.

"I've said what I've said because I thought I ought to say it, and you've no right to be angry with me." His other hand was round her waist, pulling her towards him; she resisted. "Miss Gurtha, it's breaking my heart to see you like this, and, though I warn you I believe it's the devil makes me give in, I promise to do anything you wish."

Her hands were dropped from before her face instantly.

"I didn't know before what a good fellow the devil was!" she said; and though her voice was still thick and checked by sobs, her eyes were dancing with glee. "You dear, good Michael!"

He released her wrist, contritely regard-

ing its redness, and took his arm from round her; he had not clasped her to him; he looked down on the ground, as he said: "I think you're turning your best friend into your worst enemy, Miss Gurtha."

She paused before she spoke again, then it was to ask, looking at him wonderingly: "Have I offended you, Michael?"

Some words about "causing one of these little ones to offend" floated through Michael's memory, and confused a growing purpose; but he reassured himself. "It's not causing anyone to offend—it's not wronging anyone. What am I going to do to her? To make her the wife of a man who loves her, to give myself the right to give the protection she asks for."

Gurtha was watching him; presently she said, speaking—for her—meekly: "Michael, I have no right to give you trouble. Perhaps I shall be getting you into trouble. Perhaps I had better go to school, even if it does break my heart or kill me."

"Not if I can hinder it!" he said. He confirmed his promise with an oath. Though she had never heard Michael swear before, this oath did not shock, disgust, or alarm her, as did the oaths she heard from Edgar.

"Now, what was your plan?" he said. "Let me hear it."

She told him eagerly. He was to take her in his boat a long distance, as far as he could in a day, and then—then he was to put her ashore somewhere, at some place where she could get a lodging, but where no one would know her. She would manage to have some money, and he was to sell her watch and trinkets to get more.

"Well," he asked, "and what am *I* to do?"

"Go back at once, so that no one may suspect how I got away; and come and see me sometimes."

There was a pause; then he said: "But the boat will be missed, if I'm away a whole day."

"No need to go so far, then."

"But, any way, while you are missing, I shall be suspected of murdering you; and if you're found, what better will you be off?"

"You must hide away too, then. You are more clever," she said; "you make the plan, I'll do what you tell me."

They talked a good while; when he parted from her, he said: "Perhaps you'll hear no more about being sent to school, and then things can go on as they have done."

This was but juggling his own conscience, and he knew it was so.

CHAPTER III.

"YOU'RE to go to Chevala, to-morrow, to stay a week or two with Mrs. Garstone," was, the very evening of the day of that interview with Michael, Mr. Trestrail's announcement to his sister.

"To Chevala!" she echoed.

"Yes; I'm just back from there. It's all settled."

"*Is* it all settled? You haven't asked me. Do you think you can send me about like a baby, or a bale of goods? I *shan't* go."

"I was prepared for that amiable answer. Mrs. Garstone herself is coming to fetch you; you can say to her: 'I shan't go.' It's just what she will expect from what she

has heard of you. I leave you to settle the matter with her."

"I've nothing fit to wear. I wonder you are not ashamed to send me," was said after a long pause.

"I have explained all that. Mrs. Garstone has kindly proposed to take you to Scarmouth, to get you rigged out."

"What time, to-morrow, will she be here?" was asked after another considerable pause, during which the brother and sister surveyed each other.

"I cannot tell you."

"I think you can."

"Well, I won't, then, if you prefer that form of speech.—Now, be off to bed, girl. Some friends of mine will be here directly —young fellows who are coming to spend the evening."

"The night, you mean. Gambling and drinking."

"So you watch us through the keyhole, do you, little spy?"

"I leave such mean tricks for you, sir."

"Be off, girl—be off! And mind to-morrow, no skulking. Wherever you may hide, I'll ferret you out; and then, what a nice figure you'll cut before the Garstones!"

"I can't understand your venturing to send me to Chevala, as *you* wish to be in favour there. I suppose you trust in my generosity."

"I don't send you there without sending your character before you; they are all prepared to find you prejudiced against a brother who has been your only sincere friend."

It was hardly dark yet when Gurtha ran up to her own room; she was as far as possible from being sleepy; she sat down in the open window, and let the bleak north-west wind that was blowing that evening cool her flushed cheeks, while she reflected: What did this sending her to Chevala mean? Did she intend to go? Life there would be one humiliation. No; she

wouldn't let it be that: she wouldn't care for any of them—they might think her a savage if they chose; they might think anything they chose about her, she wouldn't care. She did mean to go, then—and why? She told herself that she was curious to see whether that young Mr. Garstone always spoke to his sisters as she had heard him speak, or whether that grave gentleness was put on for outside show; whether they really loved him, or only pretended to do so; what it was like to be among such people as the Garstones.

Suddenly, a terrible light flashed upon Gurtha: This sending her to Chevala was only that Mrs. Garstone might get her wardrobe supplied, as a preliminary to sending her to school! Perhaps the plan was for her to go there from Chevala—for her not to come back to the Grange. Well, perhaps it would be easier to escape from Chevala than from the Grange, if she were

careful not to rouse suspicion by shewing that she suspected anything.

But how to let Michael know? She had told him that she should not be down in the Cove next morning; so, probably, he would be out fishing, or he would be gone to the town. She must see him before she left the Grange. The only way of making sure of this was to see him to-night.

A few moments' reflection; then she threw on her hooded cloak—left her window open—locked her door outside, taking the key with her—and stole down-stairs. No fear any one would hear her; bursts of reckless laughter and profane speech fell on her ear as she was passing the dining-room door. She had hardly passed when the door was flung open, and her brother stood in the passage, shouting for one of the men to bring in a favourite bull-dog from the yard. Gurtha shrank close against the wall, and stood there trembling. No one of the ill-regulated household answered

the master's call. Swearing horribly, he went back into the dining-room, and rang a bell, which would bring the old housekeeper, if she happened to be sober. Gurtha availed herself of this instant, and darted out of the house.

It was a wild gusty night, clouds flying fast over a watery moon, a heavy sea beating deafeningly on the rocky coast—such a night as Gurtha loved, as filled her with wild exultation. She fled through it fast, as if trying to rival the fast-flying clouds.

Before she had remembered anything but the pleasure of this rapid and lawless night-walk, she was at the gate of Michael's garden; here she paused and hesitated. It was some instinct, no consciousness, that made her hesitate outside it and not go in.

"Dear, good, industrious old fellow!" she said to herself, as through the uncurtained window she saw Michael; both elbows on the table, both hands buried in his curly hair. He was poring over a book

by the light of a candle: learning a lesson evidently, for every now and then he looked up from his book and muttered to himself.

Gurtha thought of the Grange dining-room, and of what was going on there, and said to herself: "More of a man, and a better man, and also more of a gentleman than any of the wretches up there."

After waiting a few minutes, she clattered the latch of the garden-gate as loud as she could, but the wind had done that before; she threw pebbles at the window, but the woody sprays of an ancient honeysuckle had been tapping there before; she called "Michael, Michael!" but the wind took her voice, and blew it up over the moor towards the Grange; the noise of the wind and the sea was both nearer and louder.

While Gurtha was debating what next to do, she saw Michael rise and yawn, stretching both arms over his head; then he came out into the porch to see how the night was.

"Michael, Michael!"

The moon shone on his face as, with a stride or two, he approached the gate.

"How frightened you looked!" she said laughing.

"You here, Miss Gurtha, at night! For God's sake, get home again!"

"That's civil, Michael! Why, what's the matter?"

"Well, after all, it's no matter," he muttered. "But what has happened, Miss Gurtha?—is it come?—have you run away from the Grange not to go back again?"

The gate was between them; he swung it open and seized her hand.

"No, no, Michael—what's the matter with you? I just ran down to tell you to-night, because I thought I shouldn't see you in the morning, that I'm going to Chevala to-morrow, to stay a few days. I thought you would miss me, and wonder."

"To Chevala! That's a trap, Miss Gurtha—just a trap to get you quietly away from here."

"So I think, Michael; and I wouldn't go, only that I believe I can get away from Chevala more easily than I should be able to do from the Grange, when Edgar was watching me."

"But you won't want to get away from Chevala, Miss Gurtha; they'll pet you up with soft ways and sweet words, and talk you into wishing to be like one of the young ladies there. And then—there's the young squire—he'll be making love to you."

"You're forgetting yourself, Michael," she said, with assumed haughtiness. Then, breaking into a peal of laughter,—"Why, Michael, I do believe you are jealous!"

"Yes, I believe I am."

"You foolish old Michael!—and you wicked old Michael, to believe that a few silly speeches would make me forget my dear old friend—my playfellow ever since I can remember!"

"That's all very pretty, Miss Gurtha; but"—here he spoke with a sort of despera-

tion, muttered his words between half-closed teeth, and yet in a way that prevented her from catching their sense,—"when a fellow feels as I feel, he must have all or nothing. But, Miss Gurtha, while you are at Chevala" —he had suddenly changed his manner,—"how shall I know anything about you?—how shall I know when to have things in readiness?"

"I shall write to you."

"The big round hand, then," he said, colouring.

"Of course—the big round hand. I shall send my letters to Thorney-cliff Office, and you must go there to find them."

"No good'll come of this visit," he groaned.

"I don't see what harm can come of it. Michael, you are hurting my hand."

He released it with a muttered apology.

She bade him good night, and sped away; he followed her at a distance, just to make sure that no harm befell her. It would

have been a great satisfaction to him to knock somebody down in her behalf. He saw her enter the Grange yard, having met nobody, and then he went back to his cottage, to spend great part of the night in renewed self-conflict. She gained her room by a way of her own, scaling the ivy-covered wall with cat-like nimbleness, and getting in at the window.

Next morning Gurtha took unusual pains with her dress; she spent twice the usual time over her hair, too, wreathing it up in close thick plaits, instead of letting it fly wild in untidy curls. She had attempted to dress it as the girls from Chevala dressed theirs; but Gurtha's hair, being twice as thick, and much longer—obstinately wavy and wilful, instead of soft, straight, and compliant,—the result was very different. She turned out all her dresses, trying to discover one that was neither stained with sea-weed and sea-water, nor torn with scrambling over the rocks; and at last she

found a black silk, which she had hardly worn—such a sombre gown not being to her taste or Michael's. This she put on, and then she tried the effect of a great lace collar and wide ruffles, that had been her mother's. By putting on these, and a bow of orange-coloured ribbon, she managed to make her toilette bizarre and picturesque, and to look as unlike a modern young lady as possible.

"It's been trying to civilise itself," sneered Edgar; "but I can't much compliment it upon the result." He was not down till noon that day; and soon after he had finished his breakfast, the Chevala carriage drove up. He went out to receive the ladies, and ushered them in with many apologies for the wild, neglected state of the place.

"A house without a mistress never looks anything but wretched and dismal. The state of the place so preys upon me, that I cannot bear to be much here; yet I have no

heart to set to work to improve it while I have no one but myself to please." This was his melancholy-toned speech as he led the way indoors.

"You must get it all in nice order before your sister comes home again," Gurtha heard Mrs. Garstone say. "She might have a good garden here," pausing in front of the house; "it is a south aspect, and tolerably sheltered."

"The churchyard has been the only garden the Grange has ever had!"

"It is unfortunately near."

"Some time, perhaps, I shall pull down the Grange and rebuild it. There is a splendid site not a quarter of a mile distant, which I should like some day to show you, and consult you about."

"My girls know your sister, but I have never seen her," Mrs. Garstone said as they entered the room where Gurtha was. Her voice first, and now her kindly old face, moved Gurtha in her favour: she received

her in a way that astonished Edgar—with a sort of natural dignity and cordial grace, so different from the manner he had expected. He was annoyed, for this freak of hers gave the lie to much he had said about his sister.

"She is a splendid young creature, and has been infamously neglected!" said outspoken Mrs. Garstone when Gurtha had left the room to get her hat. "Not, of course, that I much blame you, Mr. Trestrail. What can a man do with a girl of that sort?"

"What, indeed."

Mildred and Adela Garstone made various attempts to draw Gurtha into conversation during the long drive to Chevala, but in vain; she had subsided into a corner next Mrs. Garstone, and was absorbed in her own thoughts and feelings; she had never before left the Grange for one day, had never slept away from it since she was born. Her heart was very uneasy: something seemed to be tugging at it.

She was sad, and looked sulky. The want of air in the close carriage oppressed her: her face was flushed, and her brows were folded to a heavy frown. Mrs. Garstone, now and then glancing at her, half regretted the charge she had undertaken. Mildred and Adela regarded her with a curious mixture of terror, admiration, and contempt—admiration of her natural gifts, her magnificent eyes and hair, her handsome mouth, with its full red, short, curved upper lip, her glowing complexion, grand brows, and stately growth, mingling with terror of the violence of temper they had heard of, and contempt for her ignorance of all arts of dress, for her want of all personal neatness and refinement.

"Would you mind taking me back, Mrs. Garstone?" Gurtha asked suddenly. Mrs. Garstone, turning round, found that the girl's eyes were blazing through tears.

"I can hardly do that now, my dear. We are close to Chevala: the horses are

tired.—Are you ill, or have you forgotten anything?"

"It's no matter," Gurtha answered.

"But what is it, my dear?"

"I don't know."

No explanation was to be got out of her.

CHAPTER IV.

GURTHA, to her own surprise, was tolerably content to remain at Chevala. She was kept fully occupied and amused. The young master of Chevala was the only person there who annoyed her, or of whom, after the first few days, she felt afraid. Mrs. Garstone, the motherless girl soon loved; the girls she liked well enough, but found insipid; she and they had nothing in common. She could neither play, sing, nor dance; of the new novels and periodicals she had not even heard; the books she had read and enthusiastically enjoyed were such old-fashioned things as Adela and Mildred, in their turn, had not even heard of. If only Mr. Garstone would have ignored her,

Gurtha would have been wonderfully at ease. When Mrs. Garstone did not want her at Scarmouth, when milliners and dressmakers did not torment her in the house, and when she was not well-mounted, and in a borrowed habit, scouring the very lovely, soft, and wooded country which made the neighbourhood of Chevala such a contrast to that of the Grange,—she found her way to the library, ensconced herself in a nook of the bay-window, and, half-hidden by its hangings, dropped deep into a new world of wonderful beauty and fascination, the pages of the poets, old and new. If only Mr. Garstone would have ignored her—would have let her alone—would not have tried to make her talk about what she read! If he was in the room with her, she always felt that she could not get out of the range of his eyes. If she got up to leave a room, he seemed to know she did so without looking at her, and he rose to open the door. When she entered a room where he was, he always

greeted her with some kind speech. Somehow, she felt always under his observation, and as if no defect in her—of dress, speech, person, or behaviour—escaped his keen eyes.

The fact was, she was morbidly self-conscious where Mr. Garstone was concerned; he was little more than ordinarily courteous; he wished to be kind; he wished to find out what sort of a girl this was—how she could be influenced for good. Young Mr. Garstone of Chevala was a philanthropist; and in his intercourse with women,—perhaps, in part, because he had, when very young, been called to take his father's place towards mother and sisters,—he assumed a protecting kindness in his courtesy, was what Lady Duff Gordon tells us her servant called (I forget whom, and remember only the beautiful phrase) "a brother of girls." He knew enough of Gurtha's brother to have the poorest opinion of his character and conduct, and the profoundest pity for any woman in his power.

For a few days, Gurtha believed that she disliked Mr. Garstone, and that he despised and ridiculed her; but this belief only lasted a few days. Then she began to think him kind, and to feel grateful for his kindness, although still uneasy under it. She was very sensitive as to his looks and words —found herself pondering over them afterwards. She wondered what she could do to be like his sisters, and, if she were like them, whether he would be as fond of her as he was of them. She became very patient under the hands of their maid, even asking, quite humbly, to have her dress and hair arranged like theirs.

"But that won't suit your style, miss," that youug person would say, and be quite touched by the melancholy despondency her verdict created. As she said in the servants' hall, "I do believe that handsome Miss Trestrail thinks herself positively ugly, because her skin isn't as white and her hair as straight and smooth as our young ladies'!"

—"What wouldn't most London ladies give for her colour, her hair and her eyes, and, for that matter, her figure!" a footman, who thought himself *au courant* of London-life, remarked.—"It's on horse-back *I* like to see her," said the head-groom; "why she sits *Black Prince* as if she and he were cut out of one block!"

Meanwhile, poor Gurtha was utterly unconscious of being an object of admiration; took all observation as censure or ridicule, and while self-conscious, was only conscious of defects and faults. She could not be ignorant that preparations for travelling were going on at Chevala; she heard continually about travelling-dresses, travelling-trunks, guides, maps, and routes; also about a certain Edith Wintower, who was expected at Chevala soon, and who, there seemed to be some hope, might be persuaded to go abroad with the Garstones. She heard of Germany, Switzerland, Italy, but nothing about "Paris" or "school," words that

would at once have roused her suspicion. Somehow, she had grown to have a quiet confidence in the Garstones; she did not think they would enter into a plot against her—would either deceive her, or allow her to be deceived. The soft and sleepy atmosphere of Chevala, which was inland, rather in a hollow, and belted round by woods, contrasted greatly with the brisk sharpness of that of the windy Grange, and made itself felt by Gurtha; she was soothed and lulled into a sort of lotus-eating languor. She was a good deal altered and toned down when she had been a few weeks at Chevala, for the few days were run on to a few weeks, and she had hardly noticed the lapse of time. It was pleasant in a half-dream to think of Michael and the Cove, and all the old familiar life; but, at present, she had no desire to return to these things. She did not forget her promise to write to Michael, but she did not find it easy to get her letters to him. The post-office nearest

Chevala was a long distance off. A mounted messenger daily rode over to the post-village with a locked letter-bag, the contents of which underwent inspection by Mrs. Garstone before being sent off. Two or three times, Gurtha had herself posted letters to Michael on her rides, after having carried them in the pocket of her habit in vain for many days. On these occasions, she had fancied that Mr. Garstone looked gravely displeased. Once—the last time—he had asked her why she troubled herself with her letters, instead of sending them with his mother's. She had answered only that she preferred posting them herself, and she had blushed hotly; but gentle Mildred had whispered to her brother, "I daresay the letters are only to her brother, or the old housekeeper; but she writes such a shocking scrawl, poor child, and is so dreadfully conscious of it, that I fancy she can't bear to run the risk of her letters being seen."

At last there came a time when a series of accidents—weather, other engagements, and so on—made it for many days impossible for Gurtha to go near the post. Michael would be getting desperate, she thought, —might even be coming to Chevala, to see that she had not been carried off; and it would be so awkward for Michael to come to Chevala! She slipped a letter to Michael into the post-bag, among the others, and trusted that, by some happy accident, it might escape observation, question, and comment. She was in her usual half-hidden nook in the library when Mrs. Garstone, that afternoon, went through her usual inspection of the contents of the letter-bag. "Mildred, you write too often to Rose Arkwright; once a week would be often enough to answer every good purpose; I don't approve of such tremendous friendships.—Adela, I think you shouldn't have written again to Walter till you had heard again. A young girl should be maidenly and back-

ward to her lover even in correspondence. I don't see why you should write two letters for his one."

"I promised to, mamma. Walter works so very hard, and I have nothing to do."

"I hope he does work 'so very hard;' young men now-a-days have a great knack of believing themselves very hardworked. If it's true that you have nothing to do, I'm sorry for you, and I'll find you something."

"I mean nothing comparatively, mamma."

"I dare say, if the truth were known, child, your day is about as well occupied as his.—But, anyway, no good comes of these unreasonably close correspondences; they lead to the expression of a great deal of false and high-flown sentiment."

Now it came to Gurtha's turn. "Mr. Michael Petcowrie! Who's he? Who wrote this letter? Why is it here? Oh, it is from one of the servants, I suppose. Katherine has a lover, I believe. What a horrid scrawl she writes! It doesn't say

much for your teaching, Mildred, my dear."

"That is my letter," said Gurtha sturdily, turning scarlet; blushing for her own handwriting more than for anything else, as she came out of her nook and stood by the table.

"Do you mind telling me who this person is to whom it is addressed, my dear."

"An old friend of mine—my only friend."

"What is this friend of yours?" asked Mrs. Garstone, calling to mind some vague warning about "a low rascally fishing-fellow" that she had received from Edgar.

"Well," answered Gurtha, "he is only a fisherman, but still he is much more of a gentleman than"——

"Than?"

"Than any other man I ever saw—that is, till I came here. Of course, Mr. Garstone is really a gentleman, but Edgar is not, nor are any of his friends; while my friend Michael is"——

"What do you mean by being a gentleman?"

"I call Michael a gentleman, because—because he is brave—because I know he couldn't tell a lie—because he is gentle to women and children—because he doesn't use foul language."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Garstone; he had entered the room for a moment to fetch something, just in time to hear those words, but left it again directly.

"You are a true-hearted, brave-spirited girl," said Mrs. Garstone affectionately; "but though I like a girl to stand up bravely for her friends, it should not be at the expense of her relatives. You and your brother don't suit each other, and I daresay there are faults on both sides; but you must not speak of him harshly. Now, about this letter—I am sorry to disappoint vou, my child, very sorry, but I cannot let it go. I have no doubt the letter is perfectly innocent and harmless; but while you are under

my roof, I am answerable for you to your legal and natural guardian, your brother.—Take back the letter, child; I can't send it." She then turned to other things.

"If you can't send it, then I must take it—it must go." This Gurtha said after she had stood silent a few moments, flushing and trembling. She said it meditatively, not defiantly.

"Of course, of course," assented Mrs. Garstone, too deeply interested in reading the addresses on her son's letters to know to what she had assented, and the girl knew she had not heard.

Gurtha lost no time in going to her own room, and from thence descending to the shrubbery, dressed for walking. She had not gone far when she was met by Mr. Garstone.

"May I inquire where you are going?"

"Am I a prisoner? Are you my jailer?" she asked rudely, annoyed at being seen,

especially annoyed at being seen by Mr. Garstone.

"Certainly not, Miss Trestrail. Excuse my having questioned you." He drew aside to let her pass, but she lingered.

"I didn't mean to be rude. You may ask where I am going—you may know, any one may know, I am going to the post-office with this letter."

"Do you know how far off the post-office is?"

"No; but I don't care. You can tell me if there is any nearer way than the way I have ridden there."

"Why not send your letter with my mother's?"

"She wouldn't let it go with hers."

A pause.

"Are you going to tell me if there is a nearer way?"

"There is; but it is full five miles even by that nearer way."

"That is nothing—I don't care if it is ten."

"It is a most lonely road, and the evening will be closing in directly; it is dark already in the firwood you'll have to go through."

"What does that matter?—Tell me which way to start, please. I'm neither afraid of the loneliness nor the dark."

"But I am for you, Miss Trestrail. You are guest in a house of which I am master; I cannot consent to your going on such an expedition—I forbid it. It is a thing quite out of the question."

The tone was so different from anything she was accustomed to; so gentle in its firmness, and firm in its gentleness, and he seemed so completely to take obedience for granted, that Gurtha was impressed.

"What is to be done, then? My letter must and shall go. If your mother won't send it, and you won't let me take it, *how* is it to go?"

"Will you trust it to me? I am going to ride in the direction of the post-village; or rather, I can take the village on my way to the place I am going to."

She looked him in the face.

"You had better read the address before you promise to post the letter," she said. "If you promise to post it, I trust it to you. Mind," she added, "I *trust* it to you. But I don't want to deceive you into doing a thing you don't think right to do. I'd rather disobey you, Mr. Garstone, and walk to the post myself, than do that!"

Having read the address, he looked grave.

"I wish you were my sister, my poor girl," he said.

"I wish I were. But why do you wish so?"

"Because I should like to be able to take care of you as I do of my sisters. For that matter I might almost be your father, child. You are an honest, noble-minded

girl, and have no notion how to take care of yourself—you don't even know when you're in danger."

"I should like to have a brother to be kind to me as you are to your sisters. But Michael is as kind to me as a brother, and I can't be in any kind of danger from him. You are going to post my letter?"—quite coaxingly she asked that.

"Yes, unless I get your permission not to post it."

"That you won't get. I promised to write often. Poor Michael! I daresay he has been up to Thorney-cliff village two or three times already to ask for this letter. I shouldn't mind your reading that letter, every word of it—except," here she blushed deeply, "that it is so badly written and spelled. It is only to tell Michael I am still here, and tolerably contented; but that I miss him, and want to be on the beach with him again; that I hope he learns his lessons, and has had good luck in his fish-

ing. I think that's every word of it, Mr. Garstone!"

"Learns his lessons!" echoed Mr. Garstone, with an air of relief. "Your friend is only a little boy, then? I thought—I feared that it was this friend whom you were defending so warmly to my mother just now!"

"So it was. Michael isn't a little boy—he's a great big fellow. He's too big!—he's a head taller than you! He's twenty-three. He's so strong, and good, and handsome. Poor dear old Michael! He works so hard at his lessons, to please me, and he's so stupid! Only at lessons, though—he's very clever in everything else."

Her eyes and whole face were full of feeling as she said this; she was somehow conscious of some secret injustice or infidelity of her heart towards Michael. Mr. Garstone's face grew graver and graver, till, as they strolled along together, she had told him the whole history of her friendship for

Michael. She told it quite simply, and she touched him by the way she dwelt upon the fact, that this young fisherman had been literally her only friend.

"You say *has been,* I am glad to notice. You have friends here, now, Miss Trestrail."

"I am very glad if I may call you my friend," she answered; "but I thought you would perhaps despise me for making a friend of a common fisherman."

She spoke proudly, but wistfully examined the expression of his face.

"By no means. I pity you for your friendlessness; but, at the same time, young Petcowrie being, at all events to you, what you describe him, I honour your choice of him as a friend."

"Do you really?"

"Yes, really; and what's more difficult, I'm inclined to take for granted, on your showing, that this Michael Petcowrie is a good, and by no means common young

fellow. You've interested me in him, Miss Trestrail. But, nevertheless, as I said before, I wish you were my sister. If you were, neither this letter nor any other should go from you to him. I would see your friend, and give him for you any message you chose to send him; and then I would speak a little plain but friendly counsel to him for myself."

More in a fatherly than even in a brotherly way, Mr. Garstone explained to Gurtha a little of what made familiar correspondence, familiar intercourse, between herself and a young man of such different station, objectionable; telling her something of what, if he had had an interview with Michael, he would have told him of the impossibility of keeping up such a relation as now existed between them, without injury and pain resulting to them both. He understood the girl's character well enough, however, to speak lightly of the injury to her compared with that to him.

"Associating with you, Miss Trestrail, treated as a friend and equal by you, the young man's head will be full of mistaken notions: women of his own class, one of whom might otherwise have made him happy, will be distasteful to him. And when you, by marriage, or some other inevitable change of life, are separated from him, he will think himself ill-used—his life will, perhaps, the best part of it, have been spoiled and wasted. Very possibly, he will take to idle and dissipated habits, and lay all the sin of his doing so to your door."

Gurtha listened patiently, blushingly, and thoughtfully.

"You are very good," she said, "to take the trouble to talk to me like this. If Edgar would have done so long ago! However," she added, "you will post this one letter?"

He did post that one letter for her; and before returning to Chevala that evening, he made a long round for the sole purpose

of instituting some inquiries about young Petcowrie. All he heard was reassuring and satisfactory.

The next day Edith Wintower arrived at Chevala, and Mr. Garstone's thoughts were a good deal taken up with strictly personal and private interests—fluctuating hopes and fears.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Miss Wintower had been a week at Chevala, there came a great change in the weather. Till then, it had been drowsily calm, goldenly sunny; but now a mighty storm, raging fearfully on the coast, swept over the woods and down upon Chevala, making itself furiously felt even there.

As Gurtha sat and watched it, in the darkening drawing-room alone at dusk, seeing how some trees were lashed white as sea-foam, how others seemed to be stripped bare before her eyes; as she heard even through the glass the mighty roaring of the wind in some great firs, she tried to believe that this great storm in the outer world was

the cause of the restless, wild trouble of her mind.

She longed for escape now—for the sea, and the shore, and the moorland—for her untamed past life, and, as belonging to all these, for Michael; she scorned herself for the dream she had dreamed, and the ways of slothful luxury into which she had fallen.

Miss Wintower had been at Chevala a week, and by ceaseless watching of her, Gurtha had learned many things. From her bedroom window, Gurtha had watched when Edith Wintower and Mr. Garstone had paced the terrace or the shrubberies, early in the morning, or late in the evening.

From some corner of the drawing-room, she had watched when Edith sang and Mr. Garstone listened; she had watched his eyes when they followed Edith; she had thrilled at his voice when he spoke to Edith. She had drunk a subtle poison, which was now working in her blood.

Only the evening before that on which

she now sat watching the storm, and brooding over the dark trouble of her mind, she had learned all at once, at a flash, the full meaning of three words—hate, love, and jealousy.

As they were all riding home together, Miss Wintower's horse had shied, slipped, and fallen; she, always a timid and unsafe rider, had been thrown. The injuries she had sustained were of the very slightest; she had fallen lightly, and on the turf. But Mr. Garstone's face, blanched and with dilated eyes—his voice as he exclaimed "Good God!" and, giving his own reins to Gurtha, threw himself off his horse—the passionate tenderness of the words she heard him speak as he bent over the pale girl and raised her in his arms—the sight of Edith's lovely head resting on his shoulder—the expression of the eyes she lifted to his as she said, "Don't be so frightened; I'm not hurt, Harold. I'll mount again in a few moments,"—these things were a revelation to Gurtha.

Mr. Garstone had noticed some strange change of expression in the girl's face. When he had a little recovered his own self-possession, and Edith stood ready to mount again,—a pale, passionate happiness in her face,—leaning on his arm, he said to Gurtha,

"I'm afraid you were a good deal alarmed, Miss Trestrail; but, you see, thank God! she is almost unharmed."

"I wish she were dead—I hate her!" muttered Gurtha, between her set teeth; but, as she spoke, she jumped out of her saddle, and insisted on exchanging horses with Miss Wintower.

"I daresay, now he's so frightened, he'll shy a hundred times between here and Chevala; he won't throw me."

She had mounted and dashed off before anyone could prevent it. No one saw her again that night; but Mrs. Garstone, when questioned, said gravely,

"She says she has a raging headache.

She seems feverish. She does nothing but walk up and down the room like a wild beast in a cage. If she does not seem well in the morning, I shall send for Dr. Penson."

But next day Gurtha declared herself quite well, and did not seem very different from usual. Miss Wintower, having a slightly-bruised ankle, did not come downstairs that day. And Gurtha sat thinking that she must and would leave Chevala—that staying there suffocated her to choking—that she must and would have the old wild life again, for which alone, she told herself, she was fit.

Mr. Garstone had spoken to her that morning, half in gratitude, half in reproof, about what she had done the evening before.

"Edith says it was too good of you."

To which Gurtha answered:

"It was not good at all; and she needn't think I did it for her."

"For whom, then?"

"For you, because I knew you would care if she was killed, and wouldn't care if I was."

Then she had left him, giving him no chance of replying.

While she sat alone here, half hidden by the window-hangings, thinking and resolving, she heard, at first as it were without hearing, the voices of Mrs. Garstone and her son, talking in the conservatory. By-and-by she became aware they were speaking of her.

"It is doing her the greatest injustice," Mr. Garstone was saying, "this treating her like a child. She is a fine-natured creature, not difficult to manage by kindness. To send her to school against her will, at her age, seems to me a piece of tyranny. The more I think of it, the worse I like the plan. I wish I had been at home yesterday when Trestrail called."

"You always had a soft heart, Harold,

for the woes of a pretty face; but it's absolutely necessary she should go away. It's not only that her education has been so neglected, but she has got into some sort of entanglement with a young fellow of low station and bad character, and——"

"Not so fast, dear mother," Mr. Garstone broke in, by so doing keeping Gurtha silent a few moments longer. "Don't be guided by that rascal, Trestrail's, judgment. I have made inquries about young Petcowrie, and have heard nothing but good of him. Why, he's the young fellow who saved so many lives when the *Gulda* was wrecked, last Winter. Their friendship is an an old affair, beginning when she was almost a baby; and is—on her part, at least—of a most innocent and Arcadian character."

"Maybe so. For my part, I thoroughly like the girl—she is so honest and spirited. But what is to be the end of an affair of that kind?"

"That's the question. But I wish we

had been open with her from the first."

"Will you try your hand on her now?"

"No, mother. You may think me a puppy for saying so, but my influence is perhaps too great already"——

"Mrs. Garstone, I can hear all you say!" cried Gurtha so immediately upon those last words as to leave it doubtful whether she had heard them. She came now out of her hiding-place behind the curtains into the middle of the room, and stood right in the blaze of the great wood-fire: in her rich evening-dress, with her glowing face and kindled eyes, she looked startlingly handsome.

"The murder is out, then, and I'm glad of it," said Mrs. Garstone: "I hate keeping secrets, and am always a bad hand at it."

Mr. Garstone felt uncomfortably conscious of his last words—had they hurt her? Probably, he thought, if she had heard, she had not understood them.

"It's quite true," she said, turning to him

"You *could* have persuaded me to anything, if you had been open with me from the first; but you didn't try."

"You are going to be a good, sensible girl now, however," said Mrs. Garstone.—"What is the matter, child? Why are you trembling so?" She put an arm round her, drew her to her, and kissed her.

"I don't know," answered Gurtha. "I am miserable. I hate everybody. I wish I were dead! I wish I had a mother! I wish I'd never been born! I wish I'd never come here!" Having sobbed out these broken sentences, she flung herself into Mrs. Garstone's arms, and burst into the wildest storm of crying that lady had ever witnessed.

At the dinner-table that day, after the servants had gone away, Mildred—not engaged Adela—began to speak of Miss Wintower. She was evidently full of girlish curiosity as to how far things had gone between her and her brother—curiosity that

had been roused to the utmost by the fact, that Mr. Garstone had that day requested admittance to the little upstairs morning-room to which Miss Wintower was confined, and had been for ever so long (as Mildred expressed it) alone there with her. Mildred now tried to find out if this "meant anything serious," "if it was all settled," and so on.

Gurtha, watching Mr. Garstone's face, felt a sharp pang at her heart as she saw and understood its half-veiled happiness and exultation.

For some time, he took no notice of Mildred's hints further than just to parry them with evasive answers and innuendoes, but by-and-by he said, with a soft seriousness peculiar to him when he was deeply moved: "I can't jest about it, dear Mildred. I have won you a sweet sister, whom I hope you will love dearly, as she deserves. Edith has promised to be my wife."

There fell a silence. Gurtha was con-

scious of a great noise in her heart or head, of flushing and paling suddenly, but no one was heeding her.

When they all rose from the table, the two girls, before leaving the room, wound their arms round their brother's neck, kissing him, fondly whispering: "We *will* love her dearly—we are so glad!"

When he was free, he looked at Gurtha: she had been prevented from leaving the room by Mrs. Garstone's pausing in the doorway just in front of her. Stretching out his hand to her, he said: "I claim you for a sort of sister, Miss Trestrail. I know I have your congratulations too."

A mist was before the girl's eyes; she hardly saw his hand, but as she felt it clasp hers, she said: "I am sure I hope you will be always happy." Then she snatched her hand away.—"I wish everybody would leave me alone!" she cried; and pushing all obstacles out of her path, she dashed up to her own room. The other girls

had already flown up to their new sister.

"Why did you do that?" asked his mother.

"I am so sorry for that poor child. I want her to feel that she has a friend in me. God knows how sorely she may need a brotherly friend! I don't want her to think I can care nothing for her because I love another woman better."

"She's no child. You can't be a friend to her. The less she thinks about you, in any way, the better for her, I fancy."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHEN do we start?" asked Gurtha of the maid, whom, when she went to her room for the night, a day or two later, she found just finishing the packing of that very complete wardrobe of Mrs. Garstone's providing.

The woman hesitated; she had been forbidden to say anything about the journey to Miss Trestrail.

"I know all about it, so you needn't tell me any lies," was Gurtha's politely reassuring remark.

"We go as far as London to-morrow, I believe, miss, if Miss Wintower feels well enough, and the weather's better than it promises."

Gurtha knew that the plan proposed was to leave her in Paris *en route;* the rest of the family, Miss Wintower with them, proceeding to Italy.

The room that had been given to Gurtha never would have been allotted to her had they had any idea of the desperate nature of the girl. One of its windows opened into a sort of outside corridor enclosed by glass, which ran along the greater part of one wing of the house to a glass-door, from which steps descended into a large conservatory; this was locked inside at night, and the key often left in the door.

When the servant was gone, and she had been alone some time, and the house was perfectly still, Gurtha locked and bolted her room door, took off her evening dress, and put on the black gown she had worn when she came to Chevala, and her hat and cloak. Noiselessly as she could she opened the window into the corridor, stole along it, and looked through the glass-door down into

the conservatory: a glimmering spark moved up and down among the flowers and shrubs. The place was dimly lighted from the drawing-room windows; and Gurtha, standing in the dark, could by-and-by distinguish Mr. Garstone moving slowly to and fro, enjoying a cigar, the perfume of the flowers, and his consciousness of happy love.

Gurtha had to wait. At last, however, her road was clear. She got out. She flew through the shrubberies, climbed the locked gate into the park, sped through the park, and climbed the palings into the wood. Then, at last, she paused to take breath, and to think of what she had done. Escaped, alone and at night, as from a prison, from a house where she had been treated as a welcome guest, as a daughter, as a sister. The wood frightened Gurtha. It was full of fantastic terrors, from wildly-tossed boughs, grotesque trunks, unfamiliar noises, sudden and unexpected movements. She pushed through it, caught at by tangled

undergrowth of prickly brier and twisted thorn, sometimes more than knee-deep in fern: it was a passage of fear. When she was on the open moor, and in the full sweep of the wild wind, she felt safe and at home. Sometimes she ran, sometimes she walked, always making towards the sea; sometimes, for a few moments, she rested. The night was not dark; before the morning broke she had reached Michael's gate. She wrapped her cloak tightly round her, sat down on the ground, leaning against the friendly gate to wait for morning—and fell asleep. When she woke Michael was kneeling by her: he had jumped over the hedge, seeing, as he came down the garden-path, in the gray of the morning, that something leaned against the gate.

"I've run away!" she cried, starting to her feet. "How cold it is!"—yawning and shivering together.

He had risen when she did.

"I've been walking all night. I was hot

when I sat down here. I suppose I fell asleep; but it's cold now. They've been very kind to me, but they were going to take me away to-morrow.—Be quick, Michael, and get the boat ready!" She had seemed stupefied on first waking, but now her energy returned. "Be quick, Michael! They'll find I'm gone; they'll send over to the Grange; they'll come to look for you. Be quick, Michael!"

But Michael stood still and stared at her. She noticed how ill he was looking, how altered, how strange.

"Michael, I do think you took me for my own ghost."

"Miss Gurtha, do you know what it is you have done?" he asked, solemnly.

"Why, of course I do. What do you mean? Don't lose any time. Get the boat ready directly, sir, I say."

He said, impressively,

"Miss Gurtha, you don't know what it is you are going to do."

"I know what's the matter with you, at any rate," she said; "you are angry, Michael, because I didn't write as often as I had promised. You thought I had forgotten you. Dear Michael, it wasn't my fault."

"I almost came to hope you *had* forgotten me, Miss Gurtha."

"But I hadn't. I can't do without my dear old Michael. Michael, please be quick —please get the boat now."

"But, Miss Gurtha," he said, "I want to know this: do you clearly understand that, if you go away with me, as we had planned, you can never come back to be as you were before?"

"Do I want to come back?"

"But I mean, Miss Gurtha, people will say things against you—people will think things against you, the sort of things—— Well, after this no gentleman will ask you to be his wife."

These last words he blurted out; he had

meant to speak more plainly, but at the last moment his courage had failed him.

"Do I want any gentleman to ask me to be his wife?" she demanded. "Michael, do —do get the boat ready."

In the few moments that followed, Michael went through a great struggle. He stood motionless and irresolute, the girl all the while urging him on to be quick, to get ready, to lose no time; and the adversary took him unaware and at a disadvantage, after he had fought a hard fight, had come off conqueror, was weak with victory. In the time she had been away, he had come to himself, and had given up Gurtha. He had given up love and revenge, and the hope of ever seeing again the same "Miss Gurtha" from whom he had parted, and he had said, "It is best," and was settling down to a grey dull life.

"It's very stormy," he said, looking out to sea. "I don't know that it's safe, Miss Gurtha."

"I'm not afraid; I always feel safe with you."

"At least come in and sit by the fire, and eat a bit, and have a drop of hot tea. Your teeth are chattering."

"Well," she said, "if you'll be getting ready while I boil the water."

He led the way in, blew up the fire, and set some water on in a saucepan, put his tea-canister and teapot and a cup and saucer ready for her. Then he paused a moment before he left her, in spite of her impatient face.

"Miss Gurtha, I've a heavy feeling about my heart," he said—"a feeling that I'm doing you a mighty wrong in hearkening to you, and giving way to you. Will you ask God to forgive me?"

"You're doing me no wrong. What wrong can you be doing me? *Do—do* go and get ready, Michael. We can talk when we are in the boat."

He went out of the house. Cowering

over the fire, she cast curious glances round. The room was a sort of kitchen-parlour, neat and trim, flowering plants in the window, books on the window-sill. Michael had not gone far; he did not seem able to tear himself away. He was looking stealthily at her through the window; he saw her stir the fire, lift the saucepan, make the tea. As he watched this done by her in his house, the old delirium overmastered him; his fears given to the winds, with his misgivings, his self-reproach, he rushed down to the Cove like a man possessed, and got the boat ready. "At least, if I can't have her, no other man shall. We'll risk it together," he said.

Quick as he was, Gurtha was down in the Cove before all was quite prepared. She was feverishly impatient.

"Are you warmer now, Miss Gurtha?" he asked her. He threw his best jacket round her, buttoned it at the throat, to keep it fast, and as he did so, fixed such a look

of hungry love upon her, as must have startled her, had she met it; but she did not—she was looking out to sea.

He put bread and water, a flask of brandy, all the rugs and coats he possessed, into the boat, and then he gave Gurtha a few words of caution. The getting off, the getting clear of the surf, would be dangerous work. She must sit firm and quiet, do nothing but what he told her; once in the wide swell, and they were comparatively safe.

"I will do all you tell me—indeed I will, dear Michael," she promised.

"One thing more," he said. "I tell you there's mortal danger, Miss Gurtha. In five minutes the boat may be swamped, and as to swimming in that surf—— In case anything should happen to either of us, would you mind just for once doing to me what you did when you were but a baby, and never since?"

"What's that, Michael?"

"Put your arms round me, Miss Gurtha,

and kiss me of your own free will. You wouldn't if I refused to take you, would you? But you will now?"

She paused a moment. She thought of Mr. Garstone, and hesitated. She thought of Edith Wintower, and then, laughing recklessly—"You foolish old Michael!" she cried; "anything you like, only let us be quick—let us be quick!" and she threw her arms, as well as she could reach to do it, round his neck, and kissed him.

A few moments after that, they were tossing about on the surf. They were both drenched, and the boat was half full of water almost immediately. Gurtha, at Michael's command, baled out the water; and Michael, teeth set and brows knit, strained every nerve to keep the boat right.

"We're safe enough, now we're once off. They won't be getting up at Chevala for a couple of hours yet," Gurtha said by-and-by,

when they were in comparatively smooth water.

Michael answered nothing; and Gurtha, no longer having anything to do, no longer on the fret for fear of pursuit and capture, fell to thinking—of Chevala and its master—of what would be said, and done, and felt, when she was missed. By-and-by she got tired of thinking, tired of silence. As her excitement died away, fatigue made itself felt, and her spirits flagged.

The sea was turbid and stormy, very wicked and evil-looking under a lowering sky; it was all cold, cheerless, and gloomy, and the sea-birds shrieked dismally.

"I wish you would speak, Michael, it all looks so gloomy. You don't look like my Michael. I feel afraid of you. I'll jump overboard," she said, laughing.

"Be quiet, child; sit still. The weather looks bad, we shall have a squall down on us. I've work enough to manage the boat."

Something in his manner silenced her.

He spoke first next. She was shivering violently, and her teeth chattering. They had been out some hours. He bade her eat a bit of bread and take a sup of brandy, and she obeyed him. "You wish yourself back in the gay rooms at Chevala?" he said.

"No, indeed I don't, Michael; you needn't speak so crossly."

By-and-by, she noticed that he seemed to be pulling for the island.

"What's that for?" she asked quickly.

He did not answer till he had pulled a good deal nearer.

"I can't beat about in the open sea till the steamer comes in sight. She'll be late to-day—wind and tide dead against her. I must rest a bit. I'm pretty near done for," he said then.

"Poor Michael! Take something, yourself. I'll hold the oars when we get into shelter; or I'll feed you now, if you like."

"*You* hold the oars! Now I tell you

what it is—it's my mind, not my body, that's tired, Miss Gurtha. It's been just one fight now, for a good bit. Sometimes I've got so weak, I'd have lain down for my worst enemy to walk over me, and only asked for death."

He was leaning on his oars now, not using them, letting the boat rock and roll in the waves that rushed on and rushed back from the island while he gazed into the girl's face.

"What is the matter, Michael?" she asked timidly.

"The time's come when we must understand each other, Miss Gurtha. This is the matter: I love you, Miss Gurtha—not like a boy, but like a man. You must promise to be all mine—my wife. You've done it, Miss Gurtha; you've tempted me beyond what a man can bear. It's too late now; there's no going back. I love you as no man loved a woman before. Oh, Miss Gurtha, I'll worship you always! But you

must promise to be my wife—all mine, and only mine always, or we'll drown now together. Some way I'll have you; no other man shall. I had fought with myself, and conquered myself over and over. At last, I'd done with you and all the best things of life, and then you came back and tempted me,—in your ignorance, your innocence, my beauty, beyond what a man can bear! You'll have pity on me; you'll promise me now to be my wife?" He waited for her answer.

She shrank from him, pale and speechless, shrinking more and more as he bent more towards her. This was not her old friend Michael; this man, with a passionate face, and eyes at once fierce and imploring. This was a stranger of whom she felt afraid—afraid with such a fear as swallowed up her dread of her brother.

Again he urged his cause, and then again waited for her answer. It came.

"Take me back, Michael—dear Michael,

take me back, and I will promise always to love you."

"That won't do, my girl. I know what that means. And you will be another man's wife."

"Oh! Michael, I will promise never, never, never to marry anybody. I do not want ever to marry anybody," she said. And as she thought of Mr. Garstone and Edith Wintower, she burst into passionate crying, hiding her face in her lap. These tears rather hardened than softened Michael.

"You don't want to marry anybody, because you love a man you can't have," he thought.

Presently she raised her head, and renewed her entreaties. When she found them of no use, when she looked into his face, and thought she saw it stern and relentless, her passionate spirit rose. She stood up, with difficulty balancing herself in the rocking and rolling boat. She cried imperiously,

"Take me back, fellow, I command you! I'm not afraid of death now—I don't care for life now. Take me back, or I'll drown myself."

He was using every effort to steady the boat.

"For God's sake sit down, Miss Gurtha," he said; "I only ask you just to hear me."

She sat down, and then his bitterness returned upon him.

"You're like many another bad-hearted fine lady, I find," he sneered; "and I thought you so different. Too proud to be an honest fellow's wife—the wife of a man who would love you and slave for you—too proud to be his wife, but not too proud to have made a plaything of him and a tool."

"Michael, you are lying wickedly. You know it is not that!"

"What is it, then?"

"It is, that I do not love you—not in the way you want me to."

"Because I am a poor fisherman, and not a gentleman. But just listen, Miss Gurtha. No gentleman will have you after this. Your character's gone after this. That villain, your brother, who drove you to it, will lead you a dog's life after this."

"What have I done, then, Michael?"

"Haven't you run away to me? Haven't you run away with me? Aren't we alone here together, with no one to hear or to help? Don't you remember what they said of the poor parson's daughter? Don't you remember what names they called her?"

"And will they say that of me? Will they call me such names? Oh! Michael." She hid her burning face in her hands. She was beginning to understand it all; and—she thought of Mr. Garstone. Would he hear her called these names?

"I'd like to see the man who shall say a word against my wife!" he shouted, shouting against wind and wave. "The poor parson's daughter went off with a villain, who

never meant her anything but wrong. Now, I'll cut off my hand, Miss Gurtha, before I'll hurt a hair of your head—only promise to be my wife."

"What have I done?—what have I done?" moaned the girl.

"What, I swear, you shall never have cause to repent. I'll work for you like a slave; I'll treat you like a queen. I'll pass for your servant when you're ashamed to own me for your husband."

She lifted up her face.

"Michael, you do not understand me. I'd never be ashamed of you—I couldn't be so mean. I should be nothing but proud of you—if I loved you; but I do not love you. Only as a playfellow, a friend, a brother; but when you talk to me of being your wife, I almost hate you," she said slowly.

"Then you love somebody else?"

"Perhaps I do," she answered. "Some one else who only loves me as I love

you." And again she hid her burning face.

The boat had drifted nearer the island; it rocked violently in the waves that thundered against its rocky side. Michael made no effort to steady it; he was absorbedly watching the girl.

Gurtha presently again commanded Michael to take her back. "You think I am in your power," she cried; "but I am not—I am not! I don't care for life, and I am not afraid of death, and I'm in nobody's power."

He was relenting, but she did not know it.

Once more she sprang up—one foot on the side of the boat. She looked at him. Involuntarily, he stretched out an arm to hold her back, to save her, dropping his oar. She misunderstood the action. But whether the boat overturned with her, or she overset it in springing over, she could never afterwards distinctly remember. But they were both in the water, that she knew, for before

she lost her senses, she felt herself seized and saved. He managed, somehow, by an effort almost superhuman, to land her on the rock. Then a mighty billow struck him, swept him from what he clung to, dashed him against the stones, and carried him senseless out to sea.

She lay senseless on the rock—safe for some hours, for the tide was falling.

CHAPTER VII.

THE alarm of Miss Trestrail's disappearance was raised early. The gardener, going his morning rounds, found the conservatory door wide open, and made this known to the servants. The young lady's-maid thought she would run up and see if that wild girl, Miss Trestrail, was out already, or if the window looking into the corridor were still shuttered and closed. It was open; the room was empty; and the bed had not been slept in. The house was awakened. Mr. Garstone mounted immediately, and rode off to the Grange; when he reached it, Mr. Trestrail was still sleeping off the effects of an evening spent with a few of his most congenial associates. His

blasphemous oaths when, still only half-awakened, he heard what was the matter, confirmed Mr. Garstone in his previous impressions of the speaker's character. They were such as could not pass the lips of a gentleman—of any man who did not keep utterly low and vile company.

The young men went together to the Cove, to Michael's cottage. Michael was not to be found; his boat was not in the Cove or anywhere in sight at sea.

"There is little hope but that they are lost, if they put out on such a sea as there must have been early this morning," Mr. Garstone said.

"No such luck. A fellow born to be hanged, like that Petcowrie, will never be drowned. As for her——"

"Hold your tongue!" commanded Mr. Garstone.

It was to Mr. Garstone that all the precautions taken to avoid a general scandal were due. Young Trestrail thought of

nothing, talked of nothing, but revenge. Mr. Garstone had made him leave the house quietly, and now made him accompany him to Thorney-cliff village, which was just above the next Cove. They had furnished themselves with guns (Mr. Garstone had seen that his companion's was not loaded); they secured a boat, with two stout rowers, to take them off to the island, ostensibly to shoot water-fowl. By this time, the wind had sunk, and the sea moderated a good deal. They went to the island, because the fugitives might have taken refuge there; at all events, from its highest point it was possible to see to a great distance. Although the wind and the sea had by this time abated so considerably, yet reaching the island was no easy matter; and the boatmen considered it a queer freak of the gentlemen to want to go there in such weather. They landed at last, however, on its shore-ward side, and leaving the men with the boat, agreed to separate to explore it, after they had climbed

to its highest point, to search the distance. The upturned boat had drifted into a narrow creek, hidden from them by the precipitous descent of the cliff, and was beating to pieces against the rock.

"If I cross his path, I'll shoot him down like a dog, before her eyes!" cried young Trestrail.

"And if you do, no witness of mine, no effort of mine, shall be wanting to get you hanged for it," answered Mr. Garstone, in unrestrainable disgust. "For any harm that has happened, you have only yourself to blame. As far as your sister is concerned, I am convinced this is nothing but a girlish plot for escaping from what she so dreaded —being sent to school. As for young Petcowrie, the worst he has planned has been to get your sister to marry him."

"And what worse could he have planned? —the impudent scoundrel!"

"Go that way, and I'll go this; the sooner we part, the better."

Happily it was Mr Garstone who found Gurtha. She was lying, still senseless, where Michael had put her. Loss of blood from a deep wound on one temple had helped to keep her senseless. She was found but just in time (or just too soon, as she for a long time thought, poor creature!); half an hour more, and she would have been dashed over by the rising tide, and swept away. Mr. Garstone lifted her up, and carried her to where there was a patch of scanty grass. He rubbed her forehead with brandy, and chafed her hands; did all he could to restore consciousness—wrapped the plaid he had carried across his shoulders close round her. She was cold as death; for a time it was not easy to be sure that she was not dead. When her eyelids opened, and her lips moved, her first word was "Michael."

"Where is your friend?—when did he leave you?"

Thus questioned, she looked into Mr.

Garstone's face steadily. Her head was resting on his arm, and the eyes she looked up into were very pitiful.

"I am dead, then," she said,—"dead, and in heaven!"

The blood rushed to his face at something in her tone and in her eyes. He stooped and kissed her cold forehead.

"No, my poor child, you are not; you are saved—you are with a friend. But what has happened?—and where is young Petcowrie?"

She half lifted herself up, and looked about.

"I remember," she said, and paused. Then her eyes, falling on the upturned boat caught in the creek below, she screamed: "Where is Michael?"

"You do not know?"

It all rushed upon her.

"He is dead!—he is drowned!" she screamed. "He saved me—he never meant anything but to save me,—and he is dead—

he is drowned! I killed him—I upset the boat!"

A few more passionate words told him all there was to tell. There was no hope whatever for Michael; hours must have passed since he was swept away. There would perhaps be a body to recover; if so, that would be all.

When Mr. Garstone found to what an agony of remorse he had recalled the girl, he almost wished his work undone. But Gurtha soon sank into a state of partial stupor. Our greatest griefs often bring with them their own deadly opiate. Now and then she said "Poor Michael!" but not in any tone that indicated consciousness of what had happened to him.

When young Trestrail found them, before waiting to hear anything that had happened, he began to pour down upon his sister's head a torrent of foul invective. This seemed to rouse her. Looking up into his face, she said,

"You call me every name but the right. Call me a murderess."

Mr. Garstone was beside himself with disgust. Any suavity and courtesy he usually exercised towards young Trestrail (and it was not easy to him to be uncourteous to anyone) deserted him now.

"Another such expression as those you have just used, and I'll knock you down!" he said; and Trestrail was silenced. Garstone looked as if he meant what he said, and the other was a coward.

It was not without difficulty that they got Gurtha across the island and into the boat. She was known in the neighbourhood as wildly adventurous, both by sea and land. Her being picked off this island in such stormy weather did not excite much surprise in the men; they supposed she had been left there to hunt for wild-fowls' eggs, and that the storm had hindered her from being fetched off. This had happened to her before. She had met with an accident,

too, they said. The men had enough to do to make the shore again before the night was down on them, and did not much trouble themselves about anything else. Mr. Garstone told them to try and get in at Petcowrie Cove; they managed it, were handsomely paid, and sent off. They had shouted out to young Petcowrie to come down and help them with the boat; but his not answering excited no surprise. It was so dark now that they couldn't miss his boat from under the cliff; they concluded he was off to the town. Gurtha, taken out of the boat, sank down in a heap on the sand; wet, cold, exposure, and loss of blood, had taken all life out of her limbs.

"Come, girl, come; your own feet brought you here, and they must take you away again," her brother cried, shaking her roughly by the shoulder. Then, turning to Mr. Garstone, "Do you believe she *can't* walk? What the deuce are we to do with her?"

"I'm sure she can't walk. She's deadly ill, and may never walk again. Go up to the Grange, Trestrail, have a carriage got ready—any carriage you can drive yourself—get it down as near here as possible; I'll manage the rest. We'll take her back to Chevala."

"Will your mother have her?"

"Certainly she will."

"'Pon my honour, you're very good. I'm sure I shouldn't know what to do with her."

"Be quick.—And, Trestrail, remember the only thing to be said about this affair is the truth: that your sister took fright at the notion of being sent to school, and ran away."

Mr. Trestrail took his way towards the Grange. Mr. Garstone covered Gurtha as warmly as he could as she lay on the sands, and then paced up and down, keeping guard over her. The night had closed in rapidly; he could just distinguish the helpless form,

and very pitifully he thought of the life lying before this girl if she lived, the blighted life, which could never be young and innocent and happy, again, but must always have a bitter core of remorse. Whatever was the true history of what had happened, there could be no doubt that somehow that fine, brave young fellow's life had been sacrificed by her. "Human judgment could hardly think it well that she should live, but Divine love knows," he thought.

What seemed to him a very long time passed before he heard Trestrail's signal whistle from the cliff. He stooped over Gurtha then, and lifted her in his arms. It was no easy matter to get her safely up the steps, but he accomplished it. When he had put her into the carriage, she kept a convulsive hold of his arm.

"You are not going to leave me alone with him?"

"No, no; I'm going to take you to my mother."

"She needn't be so afraid. I'm not quite the brute I sometimes seem. I wouldn't hurt her *now*," muttered young Trestrail. He drove away, and Mr. Garstone kept watch over Gurtha, afraid lest, in her desperation, she should throw herself from the carriage. A few hours later, and she was delivered into Mrs. Garstone's kind and clever hands.

The physician summoned from Scarmouth remained with her all night, and in the morning pronounced that every symptom of violent fever had set in; exactly by what name to call the fever, he did not know, for the brain and the limbs seemed about equally affected. It might leave her an idiot, a cripple, or both. Poor Gurtha owed it to her strong constitution and hitherto perfect health that she fought through her violent illness to ghastly convalescence. But it was a long fight, and altered all the Garstones' plans, keeping them at Chevala that Winter. With loss of health and vigour, Gurtha had

seemed to lose all beauty. The first day she was moved from her sick-room she asked to see Mr. Garstone. He found the change in her appalling. All her hair had been cut off, a close white cap surrounded the hollow face, her great eyes had a glazed unnatural look, her temple was badly scarred, and the skin seemed strained tight over her somewhat large features. He could not help showing that he was shocked. She took the hand he held out in both hers, and pulled herself up, that her face might reach his ear.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"In the graveyard close to the Grange. The grave is as I think you would wish it: the headstone is a simple Cornish cross, in granite; there is an inscription, telling some of his brave deeds."

"Thank you," she said, sinking down again, "for this, and for all your goodness. You have never done me anything but kindness, except once, when you saved me.

A little longer, and I should have been washed away. I lie and think of that, and long to lie there now, and wait for the wild swirl of water that would end this *thinking*."

He groaned inwardly, looking at her, seeking about in his mind for something to say—something of comfort.

"If granny and the old man had been alive, I should know what I'd got to live for," she added; "but now, I don't know at all. I'd have worked for them as Michael did—just as he did, and I should have known then what I was left alive for." She turned her head away from him on the pillow, and the tears ran from her eyes; quietly as they ran down, they were, nevertheless, tears of intense bitterness.

"You're too weak yet to think of the past or the future," he said, stroking her hand gently. "The life God spared you, for his own good purpose, He will, by-and-by, show you how to use and to bear."

He was going, but she clung to his fingers :

"I should like everyone to know what I really am," she said—"a *murderess*, you know. He meant nothing but to save me, and in my passion I upset the boat. And after that, he saved me! He lost his life in saving me."

"You must not call yourself that name, or think of yourself by that name: to do so can do no good, can only work harm to you. Your mind now is weak and unhealthy, like your body; by-and-by, when you are stronger, we will talk all this over. Will you let Edith come and sit with you sometimes? I think she could do you good. She is young, but she has suffered a great deal; she is different from Mildred and Adela, and from most women. May she come?"

"No, no; I do not want her. I did not mean that—I meant I am not fit for her; yet if she will be so good, I should like her to come."

Mr. Garstone, before going away, stooped

and kissed the scarred forehead, calling her his poor sister.

Mrs. Garstone came in a few moments after, and found Gurtha strangely excited.

"Tell him never, never to do that again!" she cried.

"What, my child?—and who?"

"Your son. Tell him never to kiss me again. It was good of him: he meant to show by it that he did not despise me. It was good of him, so I am glad he has done it once; but it hurt me. Tell him never to do so again." Then she groaned—"O Michael!"

A few days later the brother and sister met. Trestrail was shocked and softened, and at the same time annoyed, by the change in his sister. He told her to get well soon, and not fret over what was done, and couldn't be undone, and he dared say it was no fault of hers. He promised her she should hear no more of being sent to school, or of anything disagreeable to her, and that

he would try and be a better brother to her than he had been.

She let her languid hand lie in his till, not knowing what to do with it any longer, he dropped it. She looked at him while he spoke, as if his voice came to her out of some other world, and she said hardly a word.

It came to be a habit of Edith Wintower's to sit with Gurtha for an hour or two every day; and Mr. Garstone was right—this did Gurtha good; she learned to love Edith, and this love lightened her heart and her life.

But when, early in the Spring, Mrs. Garstone urged that Gurtha should join their party, should spend some months more with them, travelling with them, Gurtha refused, and pleaded, instead, for the old plan, that she might be put to school somewhere—anywhere.

Pushed to extremities, and urged to give her reasons, she did give them, when she

found herself alone with Mrs. Garstone.

"Mrs. Garstone, I love your son—I am not ashamed of that, for he is worth better love than I can give him. I love Edith too; but somehow, as yet, I cannot see them together and not suffer—suffer horribly—a sort of suffering that makes me wicked. I don't understand it—for I don't want him to love me as he does her—such a thing as I am. I don't understand it—but——"

She finished with a great burst of salutary weeping, hiding her face in Mrs. Garstone's bosom.

"Bless you, my brave girl, for telling me the truth!"

And she was folded in motherly arms, and soothed by motherly caresses.

"If I could always be with you, I think I could be good!" said Gurtha; "but I can't. And, O, Mrs. Garstone, I'm so young still, and may have to live so many years! And what shall I do with my life? How shall I bear it? Where can I bury my

thoughts? He was so good, you know—so brave, so kind, and I killed him!"

"Hush, hush! You must bury your remorseful thoughts under good works, poor child! If I part with you for a little while, very soon, if you then wish it, you shall come back to me. I'll find you work, child, hard work, plenty of work, good work. When my son and both my girls are married, Gurtha—that will be before another year—I shall feel myself free to spend my money, and what's left to me of life, in carrying out a scheme of mine; and, Gurtha, I shall want some one young, and strong, and loving, to help me. In helping the widow in the hour of her affliction, in adopting the orphan (widows and orphans, child, of men lost at sea), don't you think life spent in that way may by-and-by seem worth having? The first day you can go out, Gurtha, I'll drive you to the bay where I mean this Summer to begin building a home. Don't you think, Gurtha, life may seem worth living for, when we know that

we are loved and blessed by helpless women and young children?"

The girl listened with a brightening, softening face.

And, after long years, this dream of Mrs. Garstone's became a reality. The "home" was no mere "institution," but a real home. Mrs. Garstone and Gurtha Trestrail lived there, and loved there, and made the home-atmosphere.

Gurtha regained her beauty, her youth, health, elasticity, and hope; but she was content to hope for others, and to give her youth, health, and elasticity to help stricken women to struggle through trouble, and little children to grow up loved and cared for.

She lives on there now, after Mrs. Garstone has long been dead; she has the blessings of the desolate, and the love of little children to sweeten her life.

On the Cornish cross in the churchyard near the desolate Grange hangs an often-renewed wreath.

AN EXPERIENCE.

AN EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was on a warm, early June afternoon that I was called into the consulting-room to see her. It was out of the usual hours for seeing patients, and I remember that I resented the interruption, and the irregularity; for I was busy in the anatomical department of the hospital, deep in the study of an extraordinarily interesting specimen of—but you won't care for these details.

However, when I read the note of introduction she had brought with her, I was more than reconciled to the disturbance;

because it seemed that just such a case as we had long been lying in wait for, now presented itself.

I was then young, an enthusiast in my profession, full of faith in science and in one whom I will call Dr. Fearnwell,—under whom I had chiefly studied,—without any consciousness of other kind of faith. I was ambitious; up to this time, iron-nerved and hard-headed; possibly, I should add, hard-hearted. Yet I don't know that I was specially callous, careless, or cruel. It was more because such culture as I had had was so exclusively of the head that I knew nothing about having a heart, than that I did not care to have one.

I believed myself to have, and I gloried in having, unusual power of brain. As many men I knew boasted of the many hours they could run, row, or ride, I boasted of the many hours I could read hard and work hard. I had never spared myself, and, up to this time of which I write, had

never had any warning that it might be wise to do so. I dimly suspect, however, that this warning was even then on its way—that even without the shock of which I am going to tell, some crash would have come.

I remember that when I was interrupted, to read the note which the porter brought me, the perspiration was streaming from my forehead. And yet the afternoon, though warm, was not sultry. And I had been employed in a way that called for extreme delicacy and accuracy of investigation and observation: not for physical force.

"Won't you wash your hands, sir, first? It's a woman and a child," was the suggestion of the good-hearted porter.

Though with some muttered expletives against the folly of such "fiddle-faddle," I took the man's hint, and, also, buttoned my coat over my shirt front, and pushed my wristbands up out of sight.

The venetian blinds were down in the

consulting-room, for the afternoon sun poured against its windows. Thus, until my eyes a little accustomed themselves to the dimness of the room, I could not well distinguish its occupants.

After a few moments I saw the palest woman, of the most corpse-like pallor, I ever, before or since, beheld. She was seated near a table, with a female child of some two or three years old upon her knees.

She did not rise when I went in. Possibly—probably—she could not. A woman with a face like that, could hardly stand up and hold so large a child. She wore a widow's cap, its border brought so close round her face as hardly to show an indication of hair. Her eyebrows were dark, at once decided and delicate; her eyelashes were peculiarly long and full, still darker than the brows, and almost startlingly conspicuous on the dead white of a fair-skinned face. Not even on her lips was there now any tinge of other colour.

The child upon her knees was a little miracle of exquisite loveliness. But I noticed little of this, then.

At the first moment of being in this woman's presence, I felt some slight embarrassment. I had expected to see "a common person." I felt that about this woman there was something, in all senses, uncommon.

My embarrassment was not lessened by the steady earnestness with which she fixed her deep dark eyes on mine, nor by the first words she spoke, slowly moving those white lips:

"You are very young; surely it is not to you that the letter I brought was addressed? You are very young."

The voice was the fit voice to come from such a corpse-like face. It was not her ordinary voice, any more than that was her ordinary (or could have been any living woman's ordinary) complexion.

I was still young enough to be annoyed at

looking "very young." I was impatient of my own embarrassment under her searching study of my face. I answered, rather roughly:

"My time is valuable; let me know what I can do for you—unless, indeed, you think me 'too young' to do anything."

"It may be the better that you are so young," she said. There had been no relaxation in her study of me, and her voice now, was a little more like a natural voice—like *her* natural voice, as I afterwards learned to know it only too well;—soft and sweet; a slow and measured, but intense music. "Being so young, you must remember something of your mother's love. It is not likely your mother loved you as I love this child of mine; still, no doubt, she loved you; and you, remembering her love, may have some pity left in you for all mothers. This child of mine is all I have; my only hold on hope in this world, or in another. Life does not seem long enough

to love her in; without her, one day's life would seem impossible."

Striving against the awe that *would* steal over me, looking into that majestic face, fixed by those deep still eyes, hearing that solemn voice, I said, with brusque impatience:

"I have told you my time is valuable. If you wish me to do anything, at once tell me what."

"Have you not read the letter I brought?"

"I have; but that explains nothing."

"My child is lame."

"That much I know."

"I am ready to answer any questions about what you do not know."

Then I questioned her as to the nature, extent, and what she thought probable cause, of her child's lameness. She answered always in few, fit words. I examined the child, she watching me with those deep, still eyes of hers. My heightened colour,

my increasing animation, my eager looks, seemed to stir her a little.

My interest was thoroughly roused. This was exactly such a case as we desired to experiment upon; a case in which to try a new operation, on the success of which, under fair conditions, I was ready to stake all I cared for in life. She, with that monstrous egotism of maternity, mistook me so far as that she imagined my interest to be concentrated on this one sufferer.

"Can she be cured?" was asked so hungrily by the whole face that there was no need for the lips to form the words.

"Yes, yes, yes!" I answered, with joyous triumphant confidence. "She can be cured! She shall be! She shall walk as well as the best of us!"

Before I knew what was happening—not that there was any quickness of movement, but that I was utterly unprepared for any such demonstration—the woman was on her knees at my feet. With one hand

she held the child; with the other she had taken my hand, on which she pressed her lips.

There was a speechless rapture over her face, and the most exquisite soft flush upon it, as she did this.

A queer feeling came over me as I awkwardly withdrew my hand—my hand that for a long time afterwards, tingled with consciousness of the touch of the woman's lips.

She rose, with no awkwardness, no haste; reseated herself, bent over, and kissed her child.

The child had been always watching us, its soft, serious, unchildlike eyes fixed sometimes on me, and sometimes on its mother. I had never before, and have never since, seen anything like that child's eyes. They —but why voluntarily recal them, when the effort of my life for so long was to keep them from always floating before me!

Suddenly the woman's face resumed its deadly pallor.

"Will it be very painful?" she asked.

"That is as you will."

"What do you mean?"

I explained. It was my advice that she should let her child be put to sleep with the then newly-discovered agent, chloroform.

"Is there danger in it?"

"None—if the stuff is carefully administered, as, I need not say, it shall be to your child. You can understand how difficult it is to keep a child still enough under pain, to give an operator a fair chance."

"It would be difficult with any other child, perhaps—with mine it is not difficult. She is so docile, so patient—she would keep still, and bear, uncomplainingly, anything I asked her to bear. She has already undergone great agony from a fruitless attempt at cure. But, of course, if indeed there is no

danger, I would wish "—here she paused—"oh! the weak folly of words!—to save my darling pain."

"Do you judge your child to have a good constitution? The extreme docility you speak of, is preternatural."

She answered me eagerly, assuring me that her child, except for this lameness, which she considered to be not the result of constitutional disease but of an accident, had always had perfect health. She added:

"You are too young for me to tell my story to, or I might, by the circumstances of her birth, account to you for her extreme docility."

I then questioned her as to what had been done in attempt to cure the child, and I blamed her for not having at first come to us.

With perfect simplicity she gave me the incredible answer that she had never, till a few weeks since, heard of "us." Then,

when she had replied to all my questions, seeming to win confidence in me, because of my confidence in cure, she spoke to me, with quiet intensity, of the child's peculiar preciousness to her.

To this I listened, or seemed to listen, patiently.

I was conscious that she was speaking to me; I was also conscious of her child's eyes watching me; but while she spoke and the child watched, I was arranging for the operation—the when, the how, all the details. There were difficulties in my way, obstacles to be surmounted. I was not at all sure of winning Dr. Fearnwell's consent that this child should be the first subject upon which the new operation should be tried. Dr. Fearnwell had said, I remembered, "We must first try this on some coarsely-born child, some child of robust peasant parents: some child, too, who, should its life be sacrificed, would be, poor little wretch! no loss and no great loser."

I had more faith in Dr. Fearnwell always, than Dr. Fearnwell had in himself. I had, also, more faith in science than the more experienced man had. Besides this, Dr. Fearnwell was of extreme sensitiveness and tender-heartedness; his hand could be firmer than any, and his courage cooler, but he required first to be convinced of the unquestionable beneficence of the torture he inflicted.

Dr. Fearnwell's seeing this child beforehand would be a risk (when I looked at it with Dr. Fearnwell's eyes, I recognised its extreme fragility), but his hearing the mother speak of it, and of its extreme preciousness to her, would be fatal. He would warn, and question, and caution, till the woman's courage would fail; he would think it better that the widow should keep her lame child, than run the risk of losing it in trying to cure its lameness. He was quite capable of telling her that this lameness would not kill, and that the attempt to cure

it might; and then how could one expect a poor, weak, selfish woman to decide?

Once interested in the woman, Dr. Fearnwell would think nothing of the glory to science, and the gain to the human race, of successful operation, compared with the loss to this woman if she should lose her child.

This "weakness" (so I thought it) of Dr. Fearnwell's filled me with something as like contempt as it was possible for me to feel towards one who was my hero. Against it, I determined as far as possible to protect him. Though I had no consciousness that the child's eyes touched *me*, I knew how they would appeal to Dr. Fearnwell.

While the mother talked, therefore, I was scheming and contriving. I received the sounds of her words on my ear, and they must have conveyed corresponding ideas to my brain; for afterwards I knew things which she then, and only then, told

me. But at the time, I heard without hearing, in the same way that we often see without seeing, things that vividly reproduce themselves afterwards.

"When can it be done?"

That question brought her speaking and my thinking to a pause.

"Do you stay here long?"

"Not longer than is needful for my child. I am poor. It is dear living in a strange place. But anything that is needful for my child is possible."

"If it can be done at all, it shall be done within the week."

"'If it can be done at all!' You said it could be done; you said it should be done."

The way in which this was said, the look in the eyes with which it was said, revealed something of the stormy possibilities of this woman's nature.

"I spoke with indiscreet haste when I said it could and should be done. There are many difficulties."

I then explained the nature of those difficulties in the manner I thought most politic, and most calculated to induce her to connive with me in overcoming them. I dwelt much on the morbid over-sensitiveness which would paralyse the hand of the good doctor, were she to speak to him as she had spoken to me about the extreme preciousness of her child.

She studied my face with a new intensity; then she said,

"He need know nothing about me. I need not see him till all is arranged. The child can, for him, be anybody's child."

"Exactly what I would desire. I am glad to find you so sensible. Bring the child here to-morrow morning, at ten."

White to the lips again, she faltered,

"You don't mean that it will be done to-morrow?"

"No, no, no. No such luck as that," I answered, impatiently. "There are preliminaries to be got over. The child will

have to be examined by a council of surgeons. All that is nothing to you. Bring her *to me*, here, at ten to-morrow. That is all I ask of you. This is my name, Bertram Dowlass"—giving her a card.—"You know it from the superscription of the note you brought me, but this will prevent any danger of its slipping your memory. You may trust me to do the best I can for you."

She rose to take leave. The quiet intensity of her gratitude, and her implicit, patient belief in me, did not touch me. I let these things pass me by; there was no contact.

"I have no claim whatever on your gratitude," was my most true answer to what she said. "It is not the cure of your child that I care about, but the proof that human skill, aided by science, can cure thousands."

She smiled slightly, in gentle deprecation of my self-injustice—perhaps, too, in in-

credulity of my indifference towards her child.

That was the end of our first interview. All the rest of that day I worked with divided attention, and with a strange unsettled feeling. This was a new experience, and it made me uneasy. Ordinarily I was my own master. I now put on the screw as I had never had to do before, and with little result beyond a painful sense of strain and effort.

It was natural that I should be under some excitement. I would not own to myself that my excitement was more than natural; nor would I for an instant listen to any internal suggestion that it had any other cause than that to which I chose to attribute it.

At the appointed time next morning, she brought the child. There was no quailing yet, as I had feared there might be. She was still intent upon the cure, still full of confidence in me.

When she gave the small soft creature into my hold, and it put one of its little arms round my neck, voluntarily, confidingly—I experienced a sensation I had never before known.

It turned out as I had expected. I had a hard battle to fight; my patience and temper were pretty well tried.

Dr. Fearnwell took the small being upon his knee, stroked its hair, looked into its eyes, felt its arms, and declared that this was not a safe case for operation—that the child was too delicate.

I, and one or two others, equally bent on testing the new discovery, at last overruled his judgment, and carried our point—not till I was conscious of the perspiration standing in great beads on my forehead. I do not know that I exactly lied about the little thing, but I deliberately allowed Dr. Fearnwell to suppose that the child's position was such, that it had far better die than live a cripple—possibly had better die than

live at all; that it was a child whose existence in the world was an inconvenience rather than anything else, and a constant memorial of what was best forgotten.

I was flushed with triumph when I returned to Mrs. Rosscar—so she called herself—bearing the child in my arms.

"With the sweat of my brow I have earned the healing of your child," I said to her, as I wiped my forehead.

She was standing up close to the door; her arms eagerly received the burden from mine; her tongue made me no answer, but her face replied to me.

"On Monday at eleven," I told her. "This is Thursday. In the intervening days, keep your child as quiet as you can; give her as much fresh air and as much nourishing food as you can. Dr. Fearnwell sent you this"—slipping five sovereigns into her hand—"to help to pay your expenses. He will help you as much as you may find

necessary. He is rich and kind. You need have no scruples."

The money was my own; it would have been more, but that I was short of funds just then. Her face had flushed.

"I take the money for my child's sake. I thank him for my child's sake," she said, proudly.

I was now waiting for her to go. The door of the room was open; she stood facing the opening, and the light from the long stair window fell full upon her.

For the first time I noted her great beauty. She was still young, I daresay, but hers was not the beauty that depends upon the first freshness of youth. It was the beauty of perfectly harmonious proportion. Her form was at least as perfect as her countenance. She had the most statuesque grace I ever saw in living woman as she stood there holding her child—holding it with no more effort than a Hebe

shows in holding the cup of nectar. Her deep, still eyes were fastened upon me. A curious shock went through me, even before she spoke. Her face had now again that extreme pallor, such as I had never seen on any other living face.

"On Monday, at eleven," she repeated. Her marble-pale lips seemed stiffening to marble rigidity. They seemed to form the words with difficulty. "You would not deceive me? There is not more danger than you tell me? Forgive me; but, now it is settled, my heart seems turning to ice. You would not deceive me? I know something of the callousness, the cruelty, of men; but this would be too cruel, even for a man. In all this world I have, as I have told you, nothing but this," hugging the child as she spoke, closer to that breast whose superb lines were not to be wholly hidden by the heavy muffling weeds she wore. "I have nothing but this to hope for, to work for, to live for. This is all I

have saved from the past, all that is left to me in the future."

Her delicate dark brows gathered themselves threateningly over her intense eyes, as she added, in a soft deep voice,

"There would be one thing left for me to do if I lost my child. One thing, and only one. To curse the hand—whether it were the hand of God or of man—that took her from me."

I answered her coldly; as far as I could, carelessly. I steeled myself against the tragic truth of her words; but I was conscious of a creeping of my flesh.

"Madam," I said, "you are at liberty to change your mind. All arrangements that have been made, can be unmade. I would, however, advise you to avoid agitating the child."

This drew her eyes from mine to the small face on her breast. She had not raised her voice, had not indulged in any gesture; had not betrayed, except in the

blanching of her face and the intense passion of her eyes, her agitation; the child was too young to understand her words. And yet, as we both looked at it now, its lips had parted, its face had flushed, its eyes and mouth and chin were quivering with emotion.

Perhaps the little creature was distressed by the vibrations of its mother's strongly-pulsating heart, against which it was held so closely.

She bent over it, held her face against its face, murmured soothing sounds. I was holding the door open. She now passed out without another word, and began to descend the stairs.

I stood looking after her: my eyes were caught by the glorious great knot of bright hair, which, all pulled back from her face, escaped from her bonnet behind. A slanting beam from the window had touched and fired it as she passed down the stairs.

Half-way down she stopped, turned, and

looked back and up at me. When the mother looked, her child looked too. They remained so, for perhaps half a minute.

How often afterwards, in dreams of the night, in waking visions of the dark, and worse, far worse, in the broad daylight and peopling the sunshine, looking up from the grass, or from the water, looking forth from the trees, or the flowers, hovering between me and other faces, did I meet those haunting eyes; the two pair of eyes, so like in their difference, gazing at me with varying expressions of appeal, reproach, agony, or—worst of all—resignation!

"Good-evening, Mrs. Rosscar."

I turned back into the room, but could not hinder myself, a few moments after, from looking out to see if she were still there. She was gone.

During the Friday and Saturday between that day and the Monday, I hardly thought of the mother and child. I thought constantly, and with feverish eagerness, of

the operation, and of the triumph of its success; but I did not realise the quivering agony of body and spirit—the child's body (even if all sensation were deadened for the moments of operation, there must be keen suffering afterwards), the mother's spirit—implied even in success. As to failure, I did not admit its possibility.

On the Sunday I was restless. I felt it needful to do something. I could not apply to book-study, and from the more practical part of study the day shut me off. I got on board one of the river steamers, not designing anything but to get out in the country, and have a good walk. But the first person my eye fell on, when I looked round the crowded deck, was Mrs. Rosscar—her child, of course, in her arms.

For a moment I felt afraid lest this might mean that my patient was escaping me.

"Where are you going?" I asked her, abruptly.

"I do not know," she answered, with her quiet voice and rare smile. "You recommended me to give the child all the air I could. I thought of landing at one of the pleasant green places, and sitting about in the fields for a few hours, and then taking the evening boat back again. I thought, at some farmhouse or small inn, I could get some food for her—at all events, milk and eggs and bread-and-butter."

I was standing on the deck, in front of her. I said, what suddenly occurred to me—

"You are much too beautiful and too young to go about alone in this way, among such people."

"I dare say I am beautiful, and I know I am not old; but my beauty is not of the sort to draw on me the impertinence of common people. I am not young in my soul. I know how to protect myself."

"If you don't mind my company, I'll manage for you. You are not strong

enough to slave about with that weight always in your arms. You can do it, I know; but you should not overtax your strength to-day; your nerves should be in good order to-morrow."

She blanched, suddenly, to that absolute pallor again.

"Will they let me be in the room? Will they let her lie in my lap?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred this would not answer, though it might in yours; it is difficult to make exceptions."

She gave a patient sigh; sat some time with her eyes fixed on the gliding shore; then said, looking at me again:

"Will it take long?"

"Oh, no, no; a very short time; a few moments."

"And she will feel no pain?"

"None."

She said, as if to herself, her eyes subsiding from my face to settle on the shore again:

"After all, God is sometimes merciful. I almost feel as if I could love Him. When these little feet"—touching them with a tender hand—"walk, I will try with all my soul to love Him."

I don't know what possessed me this day. I laid aside all my habitual shyness. I hardly shrank from exposing myself to the ridicule of my colleagues, should I encounter any of them. But thinking of this chance, I glanced at Mrs. Rosscar's dress, trying to discover how she would strike a stranger, and to what rank she would be supposed to belong.

Of the dress I could make nothing; it was all deep and long-worn mourning. As far as I could tell, nothing of her station could be learned from her dress.

She was standing. She had moved to the side of the vessel, a little way apart from me. She was pointing out something to the child. From the poise of her head, down all the lines of her form, to the

firmly-planted beautiful foot, from which, by times, the wind swept back the drapery, there was something regal about her. The child was daintily dressed in white; it looked all soft swansdown and delicate embroideries. It might, I thought, have been a queen's child.

I went to her side, and proposed that we should land at the first stopping place and take a rowing-boat. She agreed. She would have agreed to anything I proposed; she had a feeling that the child's life was in my hands. So we were soon gliding along the shady bank of the river—she and I and the child,—sometimes among the water-lilies and close to the swans, sometimes almost touched by drooping boughs, sometimes, for a moment, held entangled by the sedges,—all very silent.

Mrs. Rosscar was one of those women who have a talent for silence, and, more than that, who seem hardly to need speech. To-day she was content to watch the child.

The child sat on her knees, with musing eyes and tranquil face, watching the gliding water.

Now and then the child smiled up into the mother's face—now and then the mother bent over and kissed the child; there seemed no need between them for any other kind of speech. That child's smile was of the most wonderful sad sweetness; it was the loveliest and tenderest expression. I did not then, you must understand, consciously note all the things I speak of as I go along; they returned upon me afterwards. I had time enough, in time to come, to remember the past—time enough, Heaven knows!

Early in the afternoon, we stopped at a comparatively unfrequented place, and dined. Mrs. Rosscar's quiet, undemonstrative, and yet pleased and grateful, acceptance of all my services—her acquiescence in all I proposed,—did not seem to me strange; the day was altogether a dream-day. I

was in the sort of mood in which to find myself the hero of a fairy-tale's adventures would hardly have surprised me—a most unwonted mood for me.

I have thought about it since, and wondered if she acted as she did, from inexperience, or from indifference. Was she ignorant, or was she careless, as to what might be concluded about her? I believe the fact was, that she thought neither of herself, nor of me, but merely of "a good day" for the child.

She laid aside her bonnet, and her cap with it, before she sat down to table, showing that wealth of brown hair, and, what much more interested me, that head fit to be the head of a goddess.

"And yet," I thought, "she seems a very ordinary woman; she seems, even more foolishly than most women, absorbed and satisfied by the possession of a child."

In laying aside her bonnet and cap, she had laid aside, also, her shapeless cloak.

Her close-fitting black dress displayed the lines of shoulders, bust, and waist, fit to be those of that same goddess. She was a splendid *woman;* the well-formed, white, soft hands made me conclude that she was also, by conventional rank, a lady.

We returned as we had come; only that the sunset mirrored in the river, the swans, the sedges, the rippling run of the water, the capricious warm breathings of the soft wind, seemed, yet more than the morning brightness, things of a dream.

We reached the widow's lodging at about the child's bedtime. She did not ask me to go in, but I went in. She told the child to thank me for "a happy, happy time," which the little thing did with a prettiness pathetic to think of afterwards, adding, of her own accord:

"And for showing me the lilies and the pretty swans."

The mother hung on her words with

rapture, and then, raising her face to mine, said,

"If you make my child able to walk in the warm sunny grass, on her own little feet, I will learn to believe in a loving God, that I may call His choicest blessings down upon you. I will entreat Him to prosper you in all your doings, to gladden your whole life, to let the love of women and of little children sweeten all your days."

I pressed, in parting, the hand she held out to me. After I had left her, her last words went echoing through my brain.

When I got home I tried to apply myself to hard study—quite vainly. But I do not think that she, alone, was responsible for this. I believe that, just at the time when I first met her, my brain was on the point of giving-in, and of resenting the strain of some years.

This phase, at all events, of my collapse, had a strange deliciousness about it. Soft thoughts and sweet fancies thronged upon

me. I gave myself up to them, weary of the effort at self-mastery.

Again and again, as I fell asleep, I was gliding softly down a sunny river. I seemed to hear the dip and splash of oars, to feel the movement of the boat under the impulse given by them, and then the words, "May the love of women and of little children sweeten all your days!" sounded in my ears with such distinctness, and seemed to come from a voice so near, that I awoke with a start, and a feeling that I should see the speaker standing beside my bed, and that I had felt her breath upon my brow.

Then, like a fool as I was, I lay thinking of the woman who had spoken those words. "What a rich low voice she has; what sweet deep eyes she has; what a shapely foot she has; what a splendid form it is; what a soft white steady hand she has!"

"Yes," I then said to myself, trying to deceive myself. "She would make a first-rate hospital nurse; strong, calm, gentle, wise."

Next day, a day of intense excitement to me, the operation was performed. It was successfully performed. Everything that happened about this time, after that Sunday on the river, seems wrapped in a dream-haze.

But I have a distinct recollection that Dr. Fearnwell said to me, "Dowlass, you are over-doing it; I don't like the look of your eyes; take a holiday." But whether this was before the operation, or after it, I don't know. I know that I made him some jesting answer, and laughed at his grave concern.

I know that late in that day, when I first saw Mrs. Rosscar after the operation, her expression of her passionate joy and gratitude made me half delirious with an uncomprehended feeling—and that part of it was *fear*.

The child, after the operation, was placed in one of the wards of the hospital. The mother left it neither night nor day. I had

prevailed in getting this exception to rule allowed; and for this her gratitude was almost as great as for our other success.

Through the day after the operation, and the day following that, I often stole a few moments to go and look at the little patient sufferer, and at the joy-illumined radiant face of the mother. The more radiant the mother's face was, and the more entirely all seemed well, the more I felt afraid.

When, on the third day, the child sank—died in its sleep—I knew it was of this that I had been afraid.

I cannot even now account for the child's death. It should have lived and grown strong; there was no inflammation; the success of the operation was perfect.

Perhaps it was a child born not to live. Perhaps the constant presence of its mother made it keep up too strong a strain of self-control for its strength. It must have suffered, but it did not moan, or cry, or give any sign of suffering, except such as was to

be read on the often-damp brow and in the over-dilated eyes. "Eyes!" Yes. It is always "eyes." Eyes are always haunting me,—often the child's eyes, as they looked up at me, when I bent over it. I have fancied since, that it would have spoken to me then, complained of pain, but for the mother being always close and within hearing. I have fancied since, that it looked at me with that intent look, hoping that I should understand.

A poor sickly tree—I think a sycamore—grew outside one of the windows of the ward in which the child lay. It was swaying and swinging in the evening wind and evening sunlight, and its shadow was waving to and fro on the child's bed when I went into the ward on the afternoon of that third day. The child liked to watch the shadow, and had begged not to have the blind pulled down.

"Had I best wake her?" Mrs. Rosscar asked me, the moment I approached the

bed. She was looking strained to-day, and anxious. "It is rather long since she took nourishment. And last time she was awake I thought she seemed more weak and faint than she has seemed since Monday."

"When was she last awake?"

Mrs. Rosscar looked at her watch.

"Half an hour and three minutes ago; but she took nothing then, for she smiled at me, and then dozed off, just as I was going to give her her arrowroot and wine. It is an hour and a half since she had anything."

"By all means wake her," I said. It struck me that the little face looked pinched and cold. "The sleep of exhaustion will do her no good," I added.

Mrs. Rosscar bent her face over the child's face. I stood by, with my heart striking sledge-hammer blows against my side.

"Mamma wants her darling to wake up and take some wine," she said, with

her cheek lying against the child's cheek.

No movement or murmur of reply. Lifting her head, and looking into my face, she said, in what then seemed to me an awful voice,

"She is very cold!"

I pushed the mother aside, I bent over the child, I felt for its pulse, watched for its breath. In vain. I ordered flannels to be heated, and the little body to be wrapped in them and rubbed with them. I tried every means I knew of for restoring animation. In vain. While the mother was preparing food for it, the child, having smiled at her, had fallen into a doze. That doze was the doze of death.

When we desisted from our efforts to wake it, and left the poor tortured little body in peace, Mrs. Rosscar, who had been kneeling by the bed, rose. She stood motionless and speechless for moments that seemed to me no portion of time, but an experience of eternity.

I resolved that I *would not* meet her eyes; but she was the stronger willed, and our eyes did meet. I shrank; I shivered; I looked, I know, abject, craven, self-convicted. I felt I was the murderer she thought me.

Slowly, with her eyes on mine, which watched her with a horrible fascination, she lifted her grand arms, and clasped her hands above her head.

The uplifted arms, the awful eyes, the indefinite horror of that pause before speech, were enough for me.

As her lips opened, to give utterance to the first words of her curse, I, lifting my own arms, as if to ward off from my head an imminent blow (they told me afterwards of these things), and struggling for power to articulate some deprecation—I, meeting her eyes with unspeakable horror in my own eyes, staggered a moment, then fell, as if she had struck me down.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN I was again aware of anything that could have belonged to the real world—and not to the dreadful world of horrors, some terrible, some grotesque, in which my diseased brain had, during an inexplicable period, lived such life as it had known—I was in my own room in Strathcairn Street. One of the first things I consciously noticed and thought about, was the fact that my bed had been moved, from the sleeping and dressing-closet in which it usually stood, out into the open room.

My dreamy eyes took this fact in slowly; after a while, my drowsy brain languidly decided that this meant I had been some

time ill, and that the bed had been moved in order to give me more air.

This settled, my weak mind was free to take note of, and feebly to speculate about, other facts.

A woman sat at work not far from my bedside. Which of the hospital nurses would this be, I wondered. She was working by the light of a shaded lamp. This was night, then, I supposed, or, at least, evening.

Was it Summer or Winter?

There was no fire burning in the grate, and, by the moving to and fro of a blind, I knew a window was open; so I concluded it was Summer.

Night-time and Summer-time. I had, then, settled something.

Next, who was this woman? I seemed to need to settle this also.

I could not see her face from where I lay. I watched the swift out-flying and return of the busy hand, and wondered

about her, and impatiently fretted for her to turn round towards me, that I might see her face.

But she worked on.

I remember a lady once saying to me (long years after this time, but when she said it this scene returned upon me), "Work, indeed! needle-work!" she spoke with a bitter intonation and an infinite contempt. "Amuse myself with my needle! How often have I been counselled to do that! Such a sweet, soothing, quiet, gracious employment! So it is, for the satisfied, the happy, the occupied. Nothing can be sweeter than to sit at one's needle through a long Summer-day, and dream over one's happiness, and think out one's thoughts. But if one be not happy, and if one's thoughts be dangerous? Or, if one be utterly weary and ennuyée, and the mind seems empty of all thought?

"To you men it is all one. To see a woman sitting at her needle makes you con-

tent. You think she is safe, out of mischief, just sufficiently amused, and so suitably occupied! Not too much engrossed to be ready to listen to and to serve your lordships; not so far ennuyée as to be disposed to make exacting claims upon your attention and your sympathy.

"Your eyes rest on her with satisfaction; she forms such a charming picture of housewifely repose and industry—'Ohne Hast ohne Rast.' You like to let your eyes dwell upon her when you choose to look up from your paper, your review, or your wine. You feel at liberty to study her at your leisure, as you might a picture. It never occurs to you that mocking, miserable, mad thoughts may be haunting her brain—that passion, desperation, or utter wasting weariness, worse than all, may be in her soul!"

This woman, sitting by the shaded lamp in my room, worked on and on. By-and-by some lines of the throat and bust and

shoulders began to be suggestive to my slow brain. They seemed to belong to some remembered person. To whom?

As well as I could see, this woman was dressed in white—a white, short gown, such as the peasant women wear, open at the throat, loose at the sleeve; probably because of the heat, she had taken off her outer dress. As I was straining to remember, a great sense of pressure upon my brain descending on me, and grasping me with the tightening grasp of a cold and heavy hand, stopped me.

I should have swooned into sleep, but just then the woman laid down her work, looked at a watch hanging near her, rose, and came towards the bed.

Immediately, I closed my eyes; but voluntarily. She came close, bent over me, as if listening for my breath. I felt *her* breath, as she thus stooped over me. Presently she laid her hand upon

my clammy forehead. Instinct revealed to me who she was—without opening my eyes I *saw* her. A cold sweat of horror broke out over me; such life as was left me seemed oozing away through my pores; I was ready to sink into a swoon of death-like depth. But I heard these words:

"That he may not die, great God, that he may not die!"

And they arrested me on the brink of that horrible sinking away, to hold me on the brink instead of letting me fall through. Somehow those words, though they saved me for that moment, did not remove my sense of horror and fear, any more than is the victim who knows himself singled out for death by slow torture, comforted and reassured by the means taken to bring him back from his first swoon to consciousness of his next agony.

Was it that physical weakness and nearness to death gave me clearer vision than that with which I saw later, when my senses

had gathered power? It was fear I now experienced—there is no denying it—a most horrible fear. A shrinking of the spirit and of the flesh.

Why was I given over to her? Was this another world, in which she had power given her to torment me? Was this my hell? I, weak as a child, was alone with her. That awful woman with the terrible eyes, and the arms uplifted to curse me! The woman of my dread and dreadful dreams and fever-fancies!

Here, I believe, the icy waters of that horrible cold swoon closed over my consciousness. But by-and-by (and whether after moments, hours, or even days, I had no means of knowing), when I felt the gentleness of the hand that was busy about me—wiping the clammy moisture from my forehead, bathing it with ether, holding to my nostrils a strong reviving essence, wetting my stiff lips with brandy; when I felt a soft strong arm under my neck, slightly

raising my head to lean it on the yielding breast—when I felt the soothing comfort of the warmth, the softness, the fragrance of vitality, after the wormy chill of the grave, whose taste and smell seemed to linger in my mouth and nostrils—then it seemed not hell but heaven to which I was delivered.

Presently she gave me to drink some restorative medicine, which was measured out ready for me. I swallowed it. She wiped my lips. I closed my eyes. Silence was, as yet, unbroken between us.

That medicine was strong stuff; a few moments after I had taken it, life, and conscious delight in the sense of life, went tingling through me.

Almost afraid to speak, and yet too full of wonder to remain silent, after I had for some moments listened to the steady, somewhat heavy, pulsations of the heart so near which I leaned, I asked:

"Have I been long ill?"

"A month."

She had paused before she spoke, and her breast had heaved high—was it, I have wondered since, in proud disgust to bear my hated head upon it? She did not look at me as she spoke, I knew, for I didn't feel her breath.

"What sort of illness?"

"Congestion of the brain."

"Is the danger past?"

"If you can be kept from dying of weakness."

"And how comes it that *you* nurse me?"

"I have given myself up to be a nurse."

"And have you nursed me all this month?"

"No, not the first week—not till after my child was buried."

The tone of that last answer made me shudder. It was so unnatural, in its perfect freedom from all emotion.

"I shall tire you," I said; "lay me down."

Fear was regaining its empire over me. She did as I asked her, and, after she had arranged my pillows and the bedclothes neatly, moved to her work-table. The delicious sense of warm life was fast dying away out of me.

"*Are* you Mrs. Rosscar?" I asked presently, raising myself on one elbow for an instant, to look at her.

"I am your nurse," she answered me, without looking up from her work.

I made another effort to try and get things explained and disentangled, but they were too much for me. Before I had framed another question, I was overwhelmed by sleep.

That was my second "lucid interval." The first in which I was capable of speech, I believe. A week elapsed before I had another.

I knew something of what passed; I distinguished voices; I knew that Dr. Fearnwell was often in the room; I was conscious

that I had a second nurse. I knew who she was—one of the hospital nurses, a good, honest, hearty creature, but coarse and rough—a woman never entrusted with the care of delicate cases; but she seemed to act here only as servant to Mrs. Rosscar. I knew all these things, but they seemed to concern some other person. When I tried to recognise myself in things, to take hold of anything with distinct self-consciousness, then came those horrible sweats and swoons, and overwhelmed me.

It was a strange, wild phase of semi-existence, instructive to a man of my profession to pass through.

For some time after I had got on a good way towards recovery, I talked and thought of myself as "that sick man"—seemed to watch what was done to me as if it were being done to some other person.

When this phase cleared off, the sense of relief was not unmixed, for I had so laboriously to take myself to myself again

—to learn that that sick man's history was mine, that his memories were mine, his remorses mine, that I often groaned at the labour of it.

"You would never have struggled through, but for the skill and the devotion of your nurse," Dr. Fearnwell said to me.

"So he thinks I have struggled through now," I remarked to Mrs. Rosscar, when he was gone. "I must call you something different from 'nurse,'" I went on; "it is impossible that you and that good, rough creature should share one title between you."

"I should share no title with any *good* creature."

"You know it was not that I meant."

"I know it was not that you meant."

"What may I call you?"

"You may call me, if you choose, by my own name—Huldah."

"Huldah!" I repeated. "I wish you had a softer name; it is difficult to say Huldah softly, and——"

"I have known it said softly," she answered. "I have never, since I was a child, been called by that name, except by one person. You may call me by it."

Saying this, she let her eyes, which I had hardly ever, till then, for one moment, been able to meet, rest on mine with a heavy fulness of expression that sent a languid subtle fire through my veins—that also made me again *afraid.* After meeting it, I watched covertly for its recurrence.

Mine was a long-protracted, uncertain convalescence. I did not set my will towards growing well; I yielded myself up rather to the luxury of my position—yielded myself up, body and soul, as it were. I was under a spell of fascination not devoid of fear. The shock that felled me had come upon me when my whole health of mind and body was at a low ebb; in looking back, I recognise this, though I had not at the time been conscious of it. I had never, since I was a boy, given myself a

holiday—never given one hour's indulgence to any passion but that of ambition,—till I knew Mrs. Rosscar.

At the time of my meeting her I had just come to the dregs of my powers, but was not yet conscious of the bitterness of those dregs. Now, it seemed as if my whole nature — moral, intellectual, physical, — voluntarily succumbed; I lay, as I have said, under a spell, and luxuriated in my own powerlessness. As yet it was not the bitter, but the sweet dregs of the cup, that were passing over my lips.

The weather was hot; some boxes of mignonette, some heliotropes, and lemon-scented verbenas, were in my balcony. She watered them of an evening, and let the windows be open and the scent of them float in to me as I lay and watched her at her work.

While this delicious languid luxury of convalescence lasted, and did not pall upon me, why should I wish to get well? While

she was there to feed me, I would not raise a hand to feed myself. The truth was, that my nurse—my perfect nurse,—of whom Dr. Fearnwell now and again spoke with an enthusiasm and effusion that would fire my weak brain with sudden jealousy,—my nurse, who would, in untiring watchfulness and self-forgetting devotion to her task, have been a perfect nurse for any man who had been indifferent to her—to whom she had been indifferent,—was now a most pernicious nurse to me; I loved her with a desperate sort of passion—a love far more of the senses than the heart.

She was neither an innocent nor an ignorant woman. She knew exactly what to do and what to leave undone. She gave me no chance of growing indifferent through familiarity; if, indeed, with such beauty as hers, that could have been possible. As I grew better, though always on duty near me, she was less and less in my room; ever oftener and oftener, when I longed, in those

cold half-swoonings and icy sweats of weakness, with an almost delirious longing, to feel myself soothed and cherished, as on that first season of consciousness, by her close presence, there came to my call, not Mrs. Rosscar, but the other nurse, with her coarse, good-tempered face, and her form, from which—reducing, as it did, the sublime to the ridiculous, and the lovely to the loathsome, in its caricaturing exaggeration of all feminine charms—I turned in disgust.

Every day Mrs. Rosscar seemed to me more beautiful. Every day I seemed to feel her beauty more bewilderingly and overpoweringly. Not so much the beauty of her face,—it was strange how unfamiliar that remained to me, and how seldom I had a full look into it,—whenever it was possible, it was averted from me; her eyes shunned mine, and she kept the room so dim, that I had little chance of studying her expression. If I noticed this, I accounted to myself for it by supposing her to be growing conscious

of the burning fever of my passion. Not so much did the beauty of her face, I say, bind me prisoner. It was the beauty of her presence that so grew upon me—of her whole physical self, as it were. Of her mind and heart I knew nothing. With the music of her movement, the gracious delicacy and harmony of all she did, I was more and more captivated.

The accidents of the sick room, the perfect postures into which her limbs would fall when she slept the sleep of exhaustion, on the couch at the far end of my chamber, made me more and more conscious of the wonderful and rare perfection of proportion of her physical beauty. And yet it was something beyond this that enchained me.

Has the body a soul, apart from the soul's soul? Is there a soul of physical beauty?

But what I mean escapes me as I struggle to express it. In my strange passion for her, there was always something of fear.

Sometimes, in the night, I would lie awake, leaning on my elbow, and watch her sleep, and follow the rising and the falling of the now childless breast. At those times I always thought about the child, and wondered how she thought and how she suffered, and I wondered with a great awe. Was her heart dead? About all her soft gentleness there was no touch of tenderness. Did she nurse me mechanically, not caring whether it was I or another. Then recurred to me the first words I had heard her speak when I revived to consciousness: "That he may not die, great God—that he may not die!"

Remembering these first words of hers, I could hardly think her tendance mechanical or indifferent. Was she grateful to me, knowing I would have saved and healed her child? Then returned to me the scene by the small bed—the awful eyes, the uplifted arms. Often, at this point of my thinking, I would cry aloud, to find myself bathed in that terrible cold sweat, and my

cry would wake her, and her approach would then fill me with dread.

For a long time things went on without change. I got neither worse nor better. Dr. Fearnwell grew impatient.

"Your heart continues strangely weak and irritable," he said one day; saying it, he looked—I believe it was a pure accident—from me to Mrs. Rosscar, and back to me. The sudden rush of heat to my face, then, possibly, suggested something to him; for he considered me gravely, and Mrs. Rosscar judicially. I wished, how I wished, that, for the time of the good doctor's eyes being on her, she could have looked ugly!

"We must try change," he said. "It will not do to go on like this; we must try change. You are a man with work to do in the world; you must be braced up to do it. The air of the town, and especially of your room, is enervating in this warm weather."

"I am far too weak to go out," I said. "It would kill me to move."

He paid no attention to that; he was reflecting.

"To-morrow," he went on, "I will call for you in the afternoon; you can quite well bear a short journey in my carriage. I will take you to a farm-house in the country pretty high up among the hills. There you will soon get strong and well. You will be yourself again before the cold weather comes."

"I shall die of weariness," I answered, peevishly.

"Nothing of the kind; you will grow calm and strong."

"I can't possibly do without a great deal of nursing, yet."

"The good woman of the farm is a kind motherly creature; she will do all that is necessary—she and one of her cows, from which you must take plenty of new milk."

At that moment I hated Dr. Fearnwell.

I do not know what answer I might not have made him, but Mrs. Rosscar spoke, and my attention was immediately arrested.

"I am very glad you proposed this change, Dr. Fearnwell," she said. "It relieves me of a difficulty. I am unable to remain here longer. I have had news from my own neighbourhood that calls me south. Nurse Wilkins is hardly competent to undertake the sole charge of my patient in his present stage of convalescence; but the farmer's wife and the cow, between them" —she smiled, one of her very rare and very brief smiles—"will get me over my difficulty."

"We are to lose you? You are unable to remain here longer?" Dr. Fearnwell said.

He paid me a long visit that day, but very little of his attention was given to me; he seemed to be studying Mrs. Rosscar with roused interest.

"She is too beautiful and too young for

the vocation she has chosen," he said, by-and-by, when she had, for a few moments, left the room. "Besides that, she is a woman with a preoccupied mind—with a memory, or a purpose."

His last words made me shudder, but I returned him some sulky, dissenting answer. That this woman was the mother of the poor little child on whom we had operated, he did not know, or suspect.

"My poor fellow, I see you're in a devil of a temper. But I don't care; what I'm doing is for your good—if only I have done it soon enough."

"Oh! People are so very brave, always, in their operations for other people's good," I remarked, still as sulky as a bear, and yet troubled by the sound of my own words. I was mad enough to believe that Dr. Fearnwell was himself in love with my nurse, and jealous of me!

"You'll live to thank me for what I'm doing, or to reproach me for not having

done it sooner," he said, and then took leave of me.

Mrs. Rosscar returned to the room, finding me, of course, in the deepest dejection and sullenness. She looked at me, as she entered, with some curiosity or interest. It was very rarely that she spoke, except in reply; very rarely that she approached me, except when some service made it needful she should do so. To-day she spoke first, coming to my side, within reach of my hand, but averting her face from me. She took up her work, and then said,

"So it is settled? You go into the country to-morrow?"

"I don't know that it is at all settled. I am not an idiot, or a baby, that I should do exactly what I'm told. I am well enough now, to have a will of my own. Probably, when he calls for me, I shall say, 'I will not go!'"

"Do not say that," she returned, earnest-

ly. "Go, I advise you. It is true that I cannot stay here longer."

"It is true that here, or there, or anywhere, I cannot live without you," I said, in a passionate outburst.

"I own that you are not yet well enough to do without your accustomed nurse," she answered, "and your nurse does not like to have an incomplete case taken out of her hands. But, after the way in which Dr. Fearnwell spoke to-day, after the insinuations contained in his look to-day, I could no longer nurse you *here*, where I am always liable to be seen by him."

"Do you mean——" I began, with a great throbbing joy.

"I mean that if you go with the doctor to-morrow, you may find that your nurse will soon join you, if——"

"I will promise anything," I cried, grasping her hand.

"If you will be controlled and prudent,

and will not again expose me to the doctor's remarks."

"I will do, or not do, anything you tell me to do, or not to do."

"Have you a sister?"

"No."

"Does Dr. Fearnwell know you have no sister?"

"He knows nothing of me, except as a student."

"Tell him to-morrow, then, and tell the people at the farm, that your sister is coming to join you. Dr. Fearnwell won't come out often;—when he does, it will be easy to devise some reason for his not seeing 'your sister.'"

She stopped the outburst of my gratitude by rising to leave the room. Not only by this, but by the look she gave me—a dark, inscrutable, terrible look—pondering over which I grew cold.

Next day she asked Dr. Fearnwell, when he came to fetch me, how to address to me

at the farm, giving no reason for her question, which, indeed, required none. It was natural that she should wish to write to the patient to whom she had for two months devoted herself unwearyingly.

In late August and early September, the Haunted Holly Farm, under the edge of the Grey Moor, was a delicious place. Dr. Fearnwell, who had, no doubt, chosen it for its austere severity of situation, and the absence of all softness and luxuriance in its surroundings, had no knowledge of the old walled south-sloping garden, lying at some distance from the house, where, because of the bleakness of the spot, all flowers blossomed late—Midsummer blossoms postponing themselves often till August; and where, because of the good soil and the pure air, they blossomed profusely. Nor did he take note of the one great meadow, now grey for the scythe, into which the flagged path, rose-bordered, of this garden opened through a grand old gate,

with carved pillars and sculptured urns, and, on each side, an ancient lime-tree, the sole remnants of a glorious old avenue. The farm had been one of the dependencies of a great mansion.

On the second afternoon after I had come to the farm—for more than four-and-twenty hours she had let me know what it was to be without her—Mrs. Rosscar, "my sister," sat with me in the old garden, a profuse wilderness of roses and of honeysuckles; and in the meadow before us the hay was down, and the air full of its fragrance. She let me hold her hand in mine, she let me press close to her with a passionate desire to satisfy the hunger for her presence created by her absence.

"God bless Dr. Fearnwell!" I cried. "To be ill in that dingy room in Strathcairn Street was exquisite beyond anything I have known, while you nursed me; but to grow well in this enchanting place, where the air

feels like the elixir of life, with you always beside me——"

She smiled, a smile of which I saw the beginning only, for she turned her head aside. Then she sighed, and said softly,

"And when you are well—when you have no longer any excuse for claiming 'nurse' or 'sister?'"

There was in her voice, as she said this, for the first time, a slight tremulousness.

"Then," I cried, passionately, the air, the beauty of the place, her beauty, completely intoxicating me, "I shall claim a wife. I can never again do without you. You must marry me!"

Her hand moved in mine, but not with any effort to withdraw itself. She turned her face still further aside, but through the muslin that covered her bosom—she had in these days discarded her close black dresses, though wearing always mourning—I saw that the warm blood rushed across her snowy neck and throat. By that emboldened, I

pressed her for an answer, for a promise of her love. She turned on me.

"That *I* should love *you!*" she said. "Is it credible?"

She rose and left me. I sat where she had left me, pondering what might be the meaning of those words, of the voice in which they were spoken, of the look that accompanied them. The voice had none of the music of her voice; the look was incomprehensible; I could read in it, it seemed to me, anything rather than love. And yet I confidently, audaciously, believed that she loved me, but that she struggled against her love.

What motive could she have, but love, for devoting herself to me thus? Why risk good name and fame, which to so proud a woman as I thought her, could hardly be indifferent. What could I conclude but that she loved me? And yet with what a strange fashion of love—so cold, so passive, so irresponsive! With so

slight a difference, if with any difference, one might so easily express disgust.

I must have sat a long time where she had left me, for when a hand was laid on my shoulder, and a voice said near my ear, "My patient, you must come in—the dew begins to fall," looking up, I found that the sunset was burning in the west, and that the stars were beginning to show.

Somehow, the way that hand touched my shoulder, and the slight accentuation on that word "my," made me shudder. She was like Fate claiming a victim. It was only the chill of the evening that sent such a thought through me. Indoors, by-and-by, when the curtains were drawn, and the logs blazed on the open hearth, and she made my tea and brought it to me, and tended me with all watchful observance, I entered again into my fool's paradise.

And so again, next day, as, through the hot drowsy afternoon hours, she sat, and I lay beside her, on the warm hay, under the

shadow of the still fragrant boughs of one of those late-blossoming limes. My head was in her lap, and my cheek was pressed against the blue-veined inner side of that warm white arm.

Beyond this meadow stretched wave after wave of yellow corn, all in a shimmer and glimmer of heat, running down the hill, overflowing the plain, seeming, from where we were, to wash up to the very feet of the castle-dominated romantic old city.

With eyes growing more dreamy and more drowsy every moment, I watched the glisten and sheen till I fell asleep. I fancy I slept some time. I awoke suddenly and with a sense of alarm. I had had a strange and dreadful dream; words of deadly hate had been hissed into my ear by a serpent, and its cold coil had been wound round my throat.

My hand went quickly to my throat when I awoke, and there lay across it—nothing dreadful—only a heavy tress of Mrs.

Rosscar's hair, which, slipping loose, had uncoiled itself as she bent over me.

I looked up into her eyes with the horror of my dream still on me. Did I expect to find love shed down on me from them? They held mine a moment; they were full of darkness, but, as I looked up, something softened the darkness. She smiled; in her smile there was some pity.

"I was half afraid to let you sleep," she said, "but on such an afternoon, I thought there could be no danger."

"Danger! What danger?"

"Of your taking cold. What other danger could there be? You look as if you had been dreaming painfully, my poor boy."

She had never so addressed me before.

"I have been dreaming horribly," I said. "Lying on your lap, on such a day, in such a place, how could that be possible!"

She would not meet my eyes.

"I am not at all sure I have not taken

cold," I said, with a shudder, half real and half assumed.

"You must come in at once, and take some hot drink. Come."

We both rose and walked to the house. I leaned on her arm; not that I now needed its support, but I liked to feel the soft, warm arm under my hand, and I liked to remind her of my dependence upon her.

I often wondered, and with uneasy wonder, that she never spoke of her child; never, so far as I knew, wept for it. But she was a strangely silent woman. As I have said, she very rarely spoke first, or, as it were, voluntarily; and when she responded to what was said to her, it was always as briefly as possible. It seemed as if she understood how expressive was every movement of her gracious form: how needless for her, compared with other beings, was speech, even of the eyes, far more of the lips. Anything approaching to liveliness of movement, or of voice, would have

been out of harmony with her being. She was more fit to be set on a costly pedestal and gazed at, than to move in the common ways of this common world, I thought. And each unconscious pose of hers was so completely beautiful that I always thought until I noted the next—"That is how I would have you stand, that I might gaze on you for ever!"

Though I believed she loved me, I was not satisfied. I remembered her as she had been upon the river that day, aud I felt that she was changed. I remembered the smiles she had shed upon her child. If only she would smile so, once, at me—but she never did. Once, I had implored her for a full eye-to-eye look, and for a smile. Then, she had turned her face to mine; had fixed her eyes on mine; but the dark quiet eyes were inscrutable. Suddenly, just as I believed I was going to read them, she covered them with her hands, and turned her head away.

One evening, as we sat together in the warm twilight by the hearth, I tried to break down the silence between us about the child.

"Huldah!" I said, "you have not told me where your little child is lying. Let us go together to the grave. Let me weep there with you—let——" I stopped suddenly, with a cold damp on my brow, as I remembered the awful eyes, the arms raised, and the lips moving to curse me, of this very woman by whom I sat. I felt a slight convulsion of the frame round which I had thrown my arm; but when she spoke it was in the quietest voice:

"We will go there together; but not yet."

"When?"

"When you are stronger; when I am your wife."

"And you will let that be soon?"

"Yes, it must be soon."

It seemed to me her heart was beating very heavily. I told her so.

"It is full," she said, drawing a deep breath. "It is over-full."

"Of what?"

"Cannot you guess?" She leaned her face close down to mine, too close for me to be able to read it. "It is strange if you cannot guess," she added.

"If only I dared to read it by my own," I said.

"Dare to read it by your own," she answered.

"My heart is heavy and over-full with love of you, Huldah."

"And must not mine be heavy and full with love of you? Of you, so generous that you are willing to make of an unknown woman your wife: to give her your name, not asking her right to the name she bears, or to any name."

She spoke more quickly than I had ever heard her speak: still with her face so close to mine that I could not read it."

"Generous? I generous in being ready

to give for that without which everything else is worthless, all that is only any worth through that."

"That is it!" she said, with something approaching to eagerness (so answering, I thought afterwards, some inward scruple). "It is to yourself you are ready to sacrifice yourself: not to me. Suppose I tell you I have no right to the name you call me by, or to any name; that though a mother, I have never been a wife; that I shame your name if I take it; that——"

"You can shame nothing; you and shame are not to be named together. I want to know nothing of your past. What you are, is enough for me, and what you will be——my wife!"

She answered me never a word. She suffered my caresses as she suffered my other forms of speech. Not one slightest hand-pressure, even of a finger, ever answered me.

My wooing of her was like the wooing

of a statue, if only a statue could have been exquisitely warm and soft and, by contact, could have thrilled one with intensest life.

A day was fixed for our marriage. The time went on. I cannot say that it lingered, or that it flew; it was, to me, a time of intoxication—not quite untroubled by occasional pangs, and pauses of sobriety, for sometimes in those deep dark eyes of hers I surprised expressions that troubled me—sometimes looks of pity—sometimes darker looks than I could understand.

At last there came an evening when, as we parted for the night, I said: "After this night, only one night more, and then a day after which nothing but Death shall part us!"

An hour afterwards, not being able to sleep, I came back into the sitting-room for a book. She was sitting before the embers, which threw a lurid light upon her face, and upon her hands clasped round her knees.

She was so far absorbed that she did not hear the approach of my slippered feet across the floor.

I spoke to her, throwing myself at her feet. I poured out a passion of foolish eloquence. To my wonder, to my horror, to my fear, to my delight, she burst into a terrible storm of weeping.

I tried to soothe her as a lover might; but she rose, withdrew herself, and leaned against the oaken chimney-piece until the storm subsided.

I pressed to know the cause of this, grasping her hands to detain her.

"I find I am not a fiend—not an avenging spirit—only a woman—a weak, miserable, wretched woman!" She would tell me no more; she rid herself of my grasp as if my hands had had no more strength in them than an infant's. "To-morrow," she said, "by my child's grave, I will tell you more."

So she left me, to be all that night sleep-

less, and haunted by her perplexing words.

Soon after breakfast we set out, through the soft grey Autumn morning, for the child's grave. I had not known, until now, where the little creature was buried. It was not a short walk, chiefly across the moors till the close of it, when we dropped down suddenly into a little jewel of a green dell, where was the smallest of churches, overshadowed by the biggest yew-trees.

Through all the walk she had hardly spoken. The few times I spoke to her she did not seem to hear me. Perhaps she had never, since the loss of her child, looked so softly beautiful. I had never felt myself held further aloof from her—had never been more afraid of her. I followed her through the churchyard gate to the little grave.

"She lies here."

The turf on that small grave had not yet drunk deep enough of the Autumn rains to look fresh and green.

"It has had no tears shed on it; it is dry and scorched, like my heart—like my heart!"

She stood motionless and speechless for a time that seemed to me immense; her drooped eyes seemed to be looking into the earth. Presently she sank upon her knees, then dropped upon the grave, pressing her breast against it, and laying on it first one cheek and then the other. By-and-by she rose again to her knees. When she spoke, it was brokenly—piteously.

"I cannot do it!—I cannot do it! The mother in me will not let me—my child will not let me. You were once kind to her—you made her happy for one bright, blessed day. Bertram, poor boy! I had thought to do it, when I was your wife; but here, on my child's grave, I recal the curse I invoked upon you by her death-bed. I am only a weak, miserable woman, not even able to hate or to curse; everything, even revenge, is lost to me with what lies here."

She threw herself down again upon the grave in utter abandonment of grief, and I, leaning against the yew-tree, watched her weeping there. I have not much consciousness of what transacted itself in my brain meanwhile; I think I realised nothing clearly. I fancy I had a feeling of saying to myself, "I told you so," as if something I had been long expecting had happened at last. A soft, drizzling rain, that blotted out the distance and blurred the landscape, began to fall; of this she, lying always with her face pressed down upon the turf, was not aware, though I saw her shawl grow sodden under it. I remember well the words with which I recalled her to herself —they showed the blankness of my brain, and how little I comprehended the situation; yet, even as I spoke them, I was smitten by their imbecility.

"It is raining," I said; "I am cold and wet. It drips through this shelter. I shall be ill again. Let us go home."

I was tired—benumbed, mind and body. I stumbled and walked vaguely. She made me lean on her arm, and led me home. Even more silently than we had come, we went.

I was trying all the way to believe that I believed that, to-morrow, everything would be as it was to have been, in spite of this episode, and in spite of my sense of utter powerlessness under my bondage to her. When we reached the house, she was tenderly careful of me.

That evening she told me her history, and what had been her proposed revenge. She had designed to make me love her madly—that she had done; she had designed to let me marry her, who had been a mother, and not a wife; she had designed, as the wife of my infatuated love and unspeakable passion, to have cursed me as her child's butcher, at her child's grave; she had designed (or was the nameless dread and horror of my illness taking this terrific

form in its flight?), when she had thus slowly ground down my heart to its last grain of misery and grief, to murder me in my bed.

"I could have married you for hate," she said; "but for such love as has arisen in my soul for you—if, indeed, it is love, or anything but compassion and kindness towards the poor wretch I have helped back to life—never!"

She left the farm that night; I never saw her again.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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